

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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NO. 1732.—VOL. LXVII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JULY 11, 1896.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



MY DEAREST FRIENDS STOOD BEFORE ME CONVICTED OF THE FOULEST DECEIT AND FALSEHOOD.

A SISTER'S TREACHERY.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"Denzil is coming to-day, Gundred, and you can sit calmly reading," cried a clear, ringing voice; and looking up from my book I saw my sister Persis standing at the long French window of the morning room, the soft lace curtains draping her graceful form like a rich bridal veil, and throwing up the exquisite colouring of her dark glowing face. "Are you never excited about anything?" she continued, laying an emphasis on the last words, and casting a reproachful glance at me. Those great dusky eyes of hers were very expressive.

"Well, and what if he is?" I inquired, with supreme indifference. Denzil Eisdale was my affianced husband, but I did not choose to show the excitement and pleasure that was stirring my pulses and sending the warm blood dancing

through my whole being at the thought of seeing him again, after an absence of two years, which he had spent beneath a burning African sky.

I had some notion, a mistaken one I know now, that it was more romantic to hide my love, and so fell into the too common error of assuming an indifference I was far from feeling.

"Gundred, I am surprised at you! Why, if it were my lover who was coming I should spend one half the day at the window, the other at the glass!" laughed my sister, showing a double row of even white teeth between the full red lips, and drawing up her rather well-developed figure as she stared at her own reflection in the glass above the mantelpiece. "Get up, you lazy thing, and come for a walk in the garden."

"No one would think we were sisters, Persis," I observed, as I rose and closed my book with a faint sigh. "Look at my fair insipid face beside yours!"

"Inispid! Oh, Gundred! Why your eyes are bluer than an Italian sky, and your hair—well, I sometimes envy you your hair, for I never saw gold so bright nor—"

"Spare me!" I cried, "I have heard enough of my charms for one day;" but I could not help the flutter of vanity that thrilled me as I listened to her words. Would Denzil find me fair or would he deem me altered, changed for the worse? We passed out of the house in silence, bending our steps in the direction of the river that flowed through our grounds.

We wandered down the long pathways, under the shade of the limes from which our house took its name, and the cool breeze that fanned our cheeks wafted the scent of new-mown hay across the fields. It was one of those warm days when everything seems to come to one as in a dream; and I had a dreamy sense of the distant lowing of cows, of the soft song of birds in the leaf-laden trees, and the musical ripple of the broad river as it flowed on its way. We had had a glorious spring time, and on this sultry day in August the whole country lay throbbing and blushing beneath the burning gaze of the noon-day sun.

In the orchards, for miles round, the sweet, luscious fruit hung ripe on its stem, filling the air with fragrance; and the fields were golden with the tall, yellow corn, among which the

scarlet poppies nodded in the breeze that ever and anon swept across from the sea.

I seated myself on the projecting root of an old oak, and leant my back against the trunk. Persis threw herself at my feet on the thick, dry grass, and laid her dark head on my lap.

"What is Denzil like?" she asked, presently, with innocent curiosity, raising herself on one elbow, and throwing a stone into the clear depths of the river; "you know I was at school, and have never even seen his portrait."

Persis had been away a year, during which time Denzil Eisdale had come down on a visit, and so she had never seen the man who had taught me the sweetest lesson of life.

"Like?" I repeated, rather at a loss for words; "why, he is like any other man—has eyes—"

"Don't be absurd, Gundred," she replied, impatiently; "I mean is he fair or dark?"

"Oh! he has chestnut hair, brown eyes, and a brown moustache," I said, carelessly; "I have his photograph here." And I opened a locket which I always wore on a chain round my throat, and held it towards her.

"Gundred," she cried, a flush overspreading her lovely face; "is this your lover?"

The pictured face that lay framed in that large-gemmmed locket was indeed a handsome one. I could not do it justice were I to describe it minutely, for the chief charm lay in the expression of the somewhat rugged features.

"Yes," I answered, quietly; but my hands trembled as I closed the spring. How I loved him! "Do you think him good-looking?"

"Good-looking? How coolly you speak, Gundred." Her voice was a little scornful. "I have never before seen a face in which power and tenderness were so perfectly blended."

I did not make any answer, but leant back and listened with closed eyes as my sister rattled on in her clear, young voice. It was a pleasure to listen to that voice—so full-toned, clear, yet soft as the sigh of the summer breeze.

The sun was declining, casting long, yellow shadows on the river; and the soft breeze had freshened to a high wind, sounding like the rushing of waters as it swept through the tall, swaying trees, when the hard crunching of feet on the crisp gravel path roused me from my reverie, and I rose hastily from my seat, a feeling of faintness stealing over me in my agitation, for I knew that step—it was that of Denzil—my hero, my king.

Persis rose also, and stood staring at me with wide-opened eyes, but before she could utter a word Denzil was beside me, holding me in a close passionate embrace; then, as he became aware that we were not alone, he released me.

"This is my sister Persis," I said, and he turned to her with a grave sweet smile.

"So this is Persis," he remarked, stooping and kissing her, at which she blushed brightly. "Why I thought you were quite a little miss."

"Oh, yea, I am always spoken of as Gundred's little sister," replied Sis, with a soft, low laugh. "Is it not ridiculous? Why I am a head taller than she is, and, after all, three years does not make such a great difference."

"No, it does not," returned Denzil, quickly, "for I should have taken you to be the elder of the two."

She did not make any reply to this, and I feared she was offended, for I knew that no girl likes to be taken for older than she really is.

"Have you seen papa and mamma yet, Denzil?" I asked.

"Yes, and that reminds me, I was sent out here to tell you that Lord Carlyon is coming to dinner, and you are to go in directly. How shall I excuse myself?" he said, with mock penitence.

"Don't attempt it," I laughed, as I turned in the direction of the house.

I felt so joyous now that my lover had come that even the loud, rough voices of the carters, as they passed along the country roads with their loads of hay, had a tender under-ring to my ears. Might not some of them have sweethearts wait-

ing for their coming beneath the honeysuckle-covered porches of their cottage homes?

As we neared the house we paused by some rose bushes, and Denzil plucked a beautiful rose and held it out to Persis.

"Wear this in your hair to-night," he said, "it will suit your dark loveliness."

My sister's proud, beautiful face flushed with innocent pleasure at the compliment. She had only just left school, and had not yet learned the art of hiding her feelings. I was delighted to see what good friends they were, for she was my only sister, and I think I worshipped her.

"Come, children," called my father's voice from one of the windows that opened out on to the lawn; and Persis hurried forward, leaving me standing by the rose-bushes, with my lover by my side. My heart beat so that I could find no words to answer, when he bent over me and whispered tenderly,—

"Darling, this is an emblem of your own sweet self!"

He placed a pale blush rose in my trembling hands as he spoke, and I think my eyes must have said what my lips could not, for he caught me to him and pressed swift, passionate kisses on brow, cheeks, and mouth.

Oh, the exquisite joy of that moment when I rested my head on his dear breast, loving and beloved!

"Denzil!"

We were in the hall, and I wanted to speak before we joined the others.

"What is it, dear one?" he asked, standing still in the great hall, and taking my hands in his own.

"You believe that I am pleased to see you again?"

I am never very demonstrative, but I had meant to say something more affectionate; still he would understand.

"Yes, I do, dearest, for your face is an index to your heart. No thought or wish is unknown to me, and I can read the fresh, pure love that fills your heart for me better than you could tell me yourself," he replied, with a glance that thrilled me through.

How joyously I went up to my room to dress for dinner, my heart throbbing to the words, "My love has come! My love is here!"

Carefully I selected a robe I knew he would approve of—a pale, delicate blue gauze, and adorned my neck and arms with priceless pearls, and then, when my toilette was finished, I ran down to my sister's room to ask her opinion of my choice.

A flush of girlish vanity had risen to my cheeks, and as I passed the glass on my way out I could not help but see that I was beautiful, with a fair, flower-like beauty that depended, perhaps, a great deal on complexion and expression, for my features were irregular, but still beautiful, and my heart bounded with joy.

But, as I opened the door, my heart sank, and a strange unaccountable feeling of jealousy shot through me. Persis was standing in the centre of the apartment; the long trailing robe of crimson satin falling in graceful folds round her splendid figure. Gleaming diamond buckles looped back the polonaise of rich black lace, and diamonds sparkled on the snowy bosom and perfect arms, and glittered in the heavy masses of her glossy black hair. But it was her face! Never had I seen her look so lovely. Her great luminous eyes were literally ablaze with excitement, and a delicate vermillion stained the clear olive cheeks.

"Gundred," she said, turning to me with a sweet smile, "do you like my dress? It is in honour of your lover, not Lord Carlyon, you know."

"It is superb!" I replied; but I could not help wishing that she had chosen a more simple toilette, although I reproved myself for the unworthy feeling of jealousy that had swept over me on first entering the room.

"You look lovely!" she cried, as I advanced to her side, and the light of the wax candles fell upon me. "You have such perfect taste," she added, with a little sigh.

"We must make haste, Persis," I said, putting my arm round her and drawing the

stately head down to a level with my own. I was sorry for my petty jealousy, and that kiss was a kiss of peace, though she knew it not.

"Come, then, I am ready," was her reply; and together we descended the broad stairs, up which the gas in the chandelier in the great hall below sent up a flood of brilliant light, making the jewels on our necks and arms flood and sparkle.

The dining-room, a large square apartment, rendered dark by the giant chestnuts that skirted the lawn, was empty, at least I thought so; but as I closed the door a tall figure emerged from behind the heavy damask curtains and came towards us. It was Lord Carlyon.

"I was hoping you would be early, as usual," he said, holding out a shapely, yet strong hand.

Persis smiled her rare sweet smile as she greeted him, and as I saw the look of worship in his eyes I could not help wishing for his sake that she would some day learn to love him as he loved her. Lord Carlyon's was a face that inspired trust. There was something so true in the frank, rather boyish features, broad high forehead, and bright blue eyes.

As he bent his curly brown head to whisper some compliments to my sister I caught sight of Denzil coming along the terrace that led from the dining-room to the garden, and leaving them I stepped out of the window and joined my lover.

"My dainty white rose!" he murmured, clasping my hands and gazing so intently at me that the blood mounted to the roots of my hair.

We stood in perfect silence after that, our eyes wandering over the fair undulating land that lay before us, covered with a silvery mist of heat, and lighted only by the pole-star, gemmed summer sky. The harsh cry of the corn-drake came distinctly across the fields in the still evening air, sounding almost pleasant in the utter absence of all other sounds. Presently we saw the old white-haired butler passing to and fro in the now lighted dining-room, and then mamma came to the window and called us in.

There were one or two friends to dinner besides Lord Carlyon, and it was a very merry party that gathered round the great table that night.

Papa and mamma were old-fashioned in their ideas, some people said. The silver on our table was real and massive, and had descended from generation to generation; but papa said he preferred the old family plate, and would not buy new, and the delicate glass served only to brighten the table, making no showy glitter.

During dinner I noticed Persis, who was seated opposite me with Lord Carlyon, steal more than one furtive glance at my lover, who, however, appeared utterly unconscious of her scrutiny. Persis possessed great command over her features when she chose, and I could not guess from her expression what were her thoughts.

"Frank looks rather sulky," said mamma.

Denzil being the honoured guest was sitting next her, and he looked across with an amused smile. I remember now the look that came into Lord Carlyon's eyes as they met Denzil's. It was a strange mixture of sorrow and dislike. What had my lover done?

At length mamma rose and inclined her stately head, and the ladies followed her out of the room. Persis went at once to the piano when we entered the drawing-room, and commenced to sing. She had a pure, sweet contralto, and was passionately fond of music. The sound of her voice must have penetrated to the dining-room, for the gentlemen soon came in one after the other, Denzil and Lord Carlyon being last.

Persis was singing one of the songs from the *Bohemian Girl*, and as they entered her voice rang out with so much passion and pathos that I was startled.

"Some thoughts, perchance, were best to quell,
Some impulse to forget,
On which could memory cease to dwell,
We may be happy yet!"

Denzil started and turned pale, and instead of coming to my side, as was evidently his intention,

on entering, he crossed the room to where Persis sat, saying something in a low voice as he seated himself at her side. I saw her glance up, then flush, my beautiful, proud sister, as her eyes dropped beneath his gaze. What could he have said to have caused that flush?

I do not think Denzil would wilfully have caused me pain, but no one can tell the keen anguish I suffered as I watched those two sitting, laughing and talking so carelessly at the piano. Oh, heaven! Some party has spoken of the pain of too much loving. I wondered if I gave him a love that was beyond that which was right. I only knew that I felt as though my heart was dead, and life held no more joy for me. How could I live my life if he proved false?

Lord Carlyon, seeing that Denzil meant to remain at my sister's side, came over to where I was standing, and commenced talking in his easy, pleasant way.

I was very fond of Lord Carlyon. We had been friends from childhood, and the time was not far distant when he called me Gundred, and I addressed him as Frank; but we were separated for a few years, he to go to college and I to boarding school, and somehow when we met again I could not feel that the tall, handsome fellow with the drooping blonde moustache was the boy I used to play and quarrel with. Still, we were good friends as ever, and the dearest wish of my heart was to see him married to my sister Persis—my lovely, innocent sister—for I knew that he loved her truly, and would make her happy.

"Mrs. Sherbourns has promised to come over to Gaer Wood Tower and spend the day next Friday," he observed, presently. "You have not been there since the new wing was built, have you?"

"No," I replied, absentmindedly. I was thinking of Denzil's strange behaviour, for he was still at the farther end of the long room, never having glanced once in my direction; but I, too, was proud, and rousing myself I conversed with my childhood's friend as gaily as if no painful thoughts were haunting me.

How the evening passed away I do not remember. I only know that several of the lady guests sang while the elders played cribbage; and Lord Carlyon and I sat on in the shadow of the lace-curtained window that looked on to the green lawn gazing out as we talked at the starlit sky and the smooth river, in whose depths the tall swaying trees were reflected.

Once, when some one came across and asked me to sing, Denzil's eyes met mine, and to my surprise they were full of reproach, but my pride was hurt at his evident neglect, and, turning to Lord Carlyon, I replied that I did not feel well enough to sing.

"Shall we go out and listen to the nightingales?" said Frank, presently, and I rose in silence and passed out on to the lawn. In silence we walked down the broad pathways, where the trees to the right of us were grouped in gigantic masses, and nothing save the trill of the nightingale broke the stillness.

We were neither in the mood for speech. Each was busy with our own gloomy thoughts, and a dread suspicion that Denzil was not quite the immaculate hero I had pictured him had entered my mind.

The burden of Frank's thoughts I could not guess. We wandered on down the chestnut walk, past the old trunk where Denzil had found me in the early part of the evening, through the rose-garden, and so back to the house without having uttered a word; and then, as Lord Carlyon put out his hand to adjust the lace shawl that had fallen from my shoulders, Denzil came out, standing still as he observed us in the glare of the gas-light that shone far down the lawn in a ghostly, misty haze.

His face was deathly pale, I saw, as we joined him, and he turned to me half-inquiringly,—"You have had a pleasant stroll?"

"I have," I replied, calmly; and then, without waiting for him to speak another word, I stepped through the window into the brilliantly-lighted room, Denzil following silently.

Mamma saw us enter, and came across to us.

"My dear Gundred," she said, "you look tired out, does she not, Denzil? I think it is time we broke up."

Denzil turned and looked steadily at me for a moment.

"She does, indeed; but you see she has had a most exciting day," he answered, and I fancied that there was a sneer in his musical voice.

"I am really not one bit tired," I protested; but mamma was obstinate.

As we passed out of the room Denzil laid his hand on my arm and said in a hurried whisper,—"Denzil, remember your promise to be in the garden at seven to-morrow."

"I will keep my promise," I began, coldly; but as our eyes met the anger died out of my heart.

There was such a world of eager yearning in those tender brown eyes, and I pressed the hand he held out to my breast. The light that flashed over his dear face made my whole being thrill, and I went to bed with a light heart.

"Good-night, dear; I will not keep you," said Persis, as we stood alone in her room.

There were dark rings round her eyes I noticed, and her clear olive cheeks were blanched as with pain.

"Are you ill, dear?" I cried, in sudden alarm.

"No, Gundred, only tired," she replied, and she smiled that sweet low smile that gained for her so many lovers.

I was heartily ashamed of myself by this time, and could have fallen down as she stood before me in her proud loveliness and begged her forgiveness for my unjust suspicions; but I did not; I only put my arms round her neck and kissed her twice, then hastened to my own apartment.

The next morning I was awakened by the sweet carolling of birds in the trees that shaded my room, and, running to the window, threw it open, letting in a flood of rich amber sunshine.

The sky was tinged still with the glow of sunrise, and that brooding calm reigned over the whole country that is only felt in the early dawn.

I dressed myself quickly, and hastened out into the garden, singing gaily as the tiny birds above my head. I wandered on slowly, and was in no hurry to reach the rose-garden where I had promised to meet Denzil.

I felt shy of meeting him after the events of the previous evening; besides, in the clear light of day, away from his presence, I could reason better, and it did seem to me that his conduct had been strange.

"So you have come, ma belle?" said a voice at my elbow.

I had no need to look up, for that voice was only too familiar; too dear it seemed. I knew my voice sounded constrained, for he took my hand and sought to meet my gaze as I replied,—"Of course I have! I promised, and I always take a walk before breakfast."

"Denzil, why did you behave so cruelly last evening?" he asked abruptly.

"I?" I cried, in astonishment.

"Yes, you, Gundred! You seated yourself away from everyone else with Lord Carlyon, and left Persis by herself. Of course, what could I do but stay with her! And then, just when I was coming to you, I found you had gone for a walk with Frank in the grounds."

"Denzil, how can you be so mean as to stoop to falsehood to excuse yourself!" I cried, passionately, stung to bitter anger by his words. "You went straight to my sister's side, and did not attempt to leave it. You know that Frank was only waiting his opportunity to speak to her!"

He flushed, and then grew pale at my words, and I could see that something had occurred to upset him—something beyond our quarrel—for his hands trembled, and I saw his upper lip quiver.

"And are you going to quarrel with me for this trifling offence?" he asked gently, and then I lifted my eyes to his.

I could not resist the look I saw there. I suppose it was weak, stupidly so; but to feel

him near me, to have his arm round me, was joy inexpressible; and as I laid my head on his breast I sighed the last feeling of resentment away.

We walked on slowly under the shade of the old limes, and the morning breeze wafted their sweet perfume to me as the branches bent and quivered, and the sun danced in bright golden spots on the green leaves and cast queer crooked shadows on the smooth grass.

It was a lovely peaceful morning—a morning for love and hope; and I gave myself up to the pleasures of the present hour, listening in shy wonder to the soft sweet words my lover whispered under the shadow of the old limes.

Presently, as we sauntered along, now by the laughing merry river, we saw the form of a woman emerge from behind a thick cluster of elder bushes, and, as she advanced towards us, I saw that it was Persis.

She looked, indeed, a beautiful, queenly creature in her simple morning robe of palest pink cambric and filmy lace, and I sighed to think I had not been gifted with her glowing southern loveliness.

"Good morning, Denzil," she cried, coming quickly across the grass to meet us. "Why, I thought you would be in bed asleep."

A swift pleased smile came to my lover's face as she joined us, but I was not in the mood to be jealous; and so, looking on the fair picture she made, with that rare sweet smile dimpling round her curved scarlet lips, I excused him and turned to her with some laughing reply.

She raised her left hand as we three walked on over the soft yielding grass, and a ray of golden sunlight fell across and glittered in a thousand exquisite lights upon a costly diamond ring, which she wore on the third finger of her left hand.

"Where did you get that ring, Persis?" I asked in surprise, for I had never seen it before, and I thought I knew of every present she had received during her life.

"Oh, that was given to me at school," she replied; but a flush rose to her face, and her manner seemed confused.

I wondered a little over this; but I soon forgot it in listening to the pleasant conversation of my lover, for he could talk well, gliding from one subject to another, and with consummate ease and skill leading the imagination whithersoever he listed.

Not till the breakfast bell sounded did we turn our footsteps towards the house, and then we did not hurry, but loitered on the way to pluck a rose here, a pale blossom there, or a delicate feathered fern frond, as it reared its head to the blue sky above our heads.

After breakfast Denzil proposed taking us out for a walk on the river, and of course this met with our approval; so the days passed away, the first happy, peaceful, joyous days of my lover's return.

"Oh, my love, my love, how I loved you!"

CHAPTER II.

The day arrived, the all-important day on which we girls were to go over to Lord Carlyon's estate.

It was a glorious day, and my heart kept time with the gay notes of the birds that were singing in the old trees that shadowed the room in which I slept.

Denzil, my king, would be with me! I cast every feeling of doubt and fear from me on this warm, beautiful morning, and gave myself up to delicious dreamings, of which he, of course, was the head and centre.

"Denzil, your thoughts must be very pleasant ones, to judge from your face," said a voice at my elbow, and Persis put her lovely arms round my neck. "Were you thinking of Denzil? How lucky you are to have won the love of such a man." This last was accompanied with a sigh.

"Am I worthy, Sis?" I asked, a rush of

remorse paling my cheek, as I remembered my petty jealousy.

"Worthy? Yes, but do you appreciate him? You are so cold, so indifferent," she replied, almost impatiently.

Ab, Sir, if you could have read my heart, have felt its wild beatings, the joy that was akin to pain that came over me when in his presence, you would not then have termed me cold.

I believe that with all my outward indifference and coldness of manner my nature was as passionate as hers; but she was all on the surface, quick tempered, forgiving, a creature of impulses, while I was slow in my likes and dislikes, and never acted without first thinking out the consequences.

"Not indifferent, sister. I do not show my feelings so plainly as you," I said. "But come, I hear mamma's footsteps. We shall be late," and with these words I turned away and left the room, followed by Persis.

Mamma and papa were standing at the hall door, which was thrown wide open, giving a cool, inviting view of the long shady lime avenue, and the clear, smooth river, with its drooping willows and bushy undergrowth.

The carriage was waiting, and in a few moments we were bowling swiftly down the avenue, chatting gaily. Mamma always entered into our enjoyments, and to day she seemed joyous beyond measure, laughing as merrily as a young girl over my sister's witty little speeches, chiding softly when she compared Lord Carlyon's boyish handsomeness with the more matured beauty of Denzil's manly face. I think she hoped that that day would settle the future for Persis—and so it did!

Gaer Wood Tower was about five miles from our place, and the drive was one of the most enjoyable I had ever had; every moment brought me nearer the one who was above all others to me.

We arrived there exactly at the appointed time, the great clock in the centre tower was just booming forth twelve as the massive gates swung back to give ingress to our carriage.

I could see Denzil standing on the wide terrace that faced the lawn, and I felt as though I could not sit quietly there. I longed to get out to run to meet him; but I conquered the feeling. What would those around me say to such a proceeding, and we should meet in a few moments, after all?

The tender light that had leaped to Denzil's eyes as he assisted me out of the carriage had not vanished when he turned to greet Persis, and I saw Frank's face flush, and he looked quickly at them as they stood together in the warm sunlight, while a haughty, almost fierce expression swept over his boyish features. That look came back to me in the after time of dread and crime with vivid distinctness, came back and haunted me, bringing with it confirmation of the doubts and fears I would fain have crushed.

Lady Carlyon was a thorough aristocrat in her appearance and manner; there was that gracious sweetness in her smile and quick ring of sincerity in her well-modulated voice as she greeted us that bespoke her gentle birth; and I thought then, as I had often thought before, "No wonder your son is so perfect a gentleman in his behaviour to women!"

"I was so afraid you would not come early," she observed when the greetings were over.

"You see, I remember my own young days, and girls like to have some little time to think over their toilette," and she smiled a sweet smile that had in it a tinge of sadness, which made me fancy she was thinking of her dead husband.

We passed into the house as we conversed, and a glow of pride thrilled me as I thought that my sister would be mistress of this grand old home, with its exquisite carvings and long corridors, where hung the portraits of generation after generation of the Carlyons.

The sunlight glinted in through the long windows, and threw up the rich paintings of the lofty ceiling, and shone on the rare

sculptured figures that filled every niche of the corridor which we were traversing.

I could see the western side of Gaer Wood Park through the farthest windows—a rich expanse of undulating wooded land, with a glimpse between the swaying trees of a river, the same that wound its way through our grounds.

Lady Carlyon carried mamma off to her boudoir to have a quiet chat after a time, and then Lord Carlyon proposed a stroll in the garden.

We went out into the warm air, out into the garden, where the birds twittered so gaily, and gaudy butterflies circled and danced over the swaying bushes, and soft, velvet-bodied bees hummed drowsily from flower to flower; on beneath the cool shade of fruit trees, heavy with fragrant fruits, until we reached a narrow path beside a high hedge which led from the country-side town to a village about a mile off.

This path had been made a right-of-way, and so I felt no surprise when a strongly-built tall young fellow came bounding over a stile, whistling softly to himself.

He was slightly taller than Denzil and about the same age, and there was a certain nameless something about him that struck me as being familiar.

He turned with a half-careless indifference and gazed at us; then, as his eyes rested first on my lover, then on Persis, he started and paused, but only for a moment; the next he was walking away with an easy swinging step, whistling as before.

"That young fellow had a handsome face; but were he a relation of mine I could wish there was less recklessness in the expression," observed Lord Carlyon.

"It is a face that I shall remember," I replied, quietly.

Somehow there seemed to have fallen a shadow over us with the advent of that careless, reckless-faced stranger, and by mutual though silent consent we turned and retraced our steps.

"Persis, you are singularly silent," remarked Denzil, putting his hand on her shoulder.

Was it my fancy, I wondered, that his voice sounded strange?

"Oh, I am thinking," she said, with a laugh.

The unreal sound of that laugh made me turn my eyes from the fair landscape to her face.

It was pale as a white rose, and the firm lips were set tightly together, as though she were in pain.

What had brought that look of repressed misery to the young, innocent face?

"Dearest!" I cried. "What is it? Tell me!"

"Why, Gundred," she said, gazing calmly at me with those great luminous eyes, "I did not know you were given to heroics!"

Lord Carlyon looked from one to the other, and with his usual ready tact he changed the subject by making some remark about the way in which the new gardener had laid out the "Lady's Bower," a name given to one of the prettiest spots on the whole estate.

I answered his questions in my usual tones, and we were apparently in the same spirits when we once more entered Gaer Wood Tower as when we passed out of it one short hour before; but some instinct told me that a new element had come into our lives, and even then the shadow of the dread tragedy of my life seemed to hover over me, for I shivered in the warm sunlight.

Mamma and papa were in excellent spirits, and kept up a constant flow of bright, pleasant conversation during luncheon.

I could not feel dull in such company, and the other three joined heartily in the enjoyment of the hour.

Persis, indeed, seemed to have entirely forgotten her indisposition, or whatever it was, for she laughed and talked, giving us little sketches of her adventures at school, and otherwise rendering herself quite an acquisition to the party.

"I always thought you a charming child, Persis, and you have more than fulfilled the promise of your childhood," said Lady Carlyon that night,

as we stood on the steps in the clear starlight, bidding them good-bye.

"Good-night, Persis," I heard Lord Carlyon whisper. "I shall come over to the Limes tomorrow, when I shall have a question to ask you."

A rich glow, like the glow of a damask rose, flushed over her lovely face, and I saw in the starlight her proud, dark head droop and the large eyes fall beneath his gaze.

Had she learned to love him already? It would seem so; but, then, Persis was ever quick to love and quick to hate.

Early next day Lord Carlyon rode over. There was a flush of excitement on his handsome boyish face, and his blue eyes were aglow with the unmistakable light of love.

We were in the breakfast-room talking over our plans for a ball which was to be given at the end of the ensuing week, and presently he drew Persis out of the room, making some careless remark about wishing to see some rare ferns that had been sent us by a friend.

It was past the usual luncheon hour when they returned, and I could see by the happy light on their young faces that the question he had asked had been answered satisfactorily.

I do not know why, but as I looked at them sitting before me at the dower-laden table the face of that young fellow, with its reckless, dare-devil expression, came between me and them, and again that unaccountable shiver passed over me.

When Lord Carlyon had taken his leave, which he did soon after luncheon was over, Persis called me to her side.

"Gundred, will you come for a walk with me?" she asked, and there was a ring of shyness in her clear, full-toned voice.

"Of course I will, dear," I replied, quickly.

She did not speak for some little time, not until we had reached the river, and were standing under the shade of the willows, and I waited for her to break the silence.

"Gundred, he loves me, and has asked me to be his wife!"

How the rich voice quivered and sank as she spoke those words, and the lovely innocent face flushed into greater beauty under the influence of this love that had come into her life. Her large eyes were black with emotion, and the colour came and went on her pure cheeks with each word she uttered.

"And you, Persis?" I whispered, bending over her. She was kneeling in the long grass at my feet, and the soft rhythmical murmur of the river mingled itself with her low tremulous tones as she murmured her reply.

"I have promised, for I love him! Oh, Gundred, if anything should happen to part us I should die!"

"Persis, how silly of you to talk like that," I cried, gazing in astonishment at her, for she had risen and stood before me now with wild, frightened eyes and outstretched hands.

"I know it is more than silly, it is vain! But, oh! you do not know how I love him—how the mere thought of separation drives me mad!"

"But why think of it—why let your mind dwell upon impossibilities?" I interrupted, a little impatiently, for this seemed more like the heroics of a school girl than the conversation of a woman.

"Ah, Dreda, who can see into the future? What is it the song says,—

"What is coming, who can say?"

We cannot tell, and I feel that such a love as mine never can come to a happy ending; it would be too bright, too beautiful for this world."

"You are growing terribly sentimental, Persis."

I laughed as I spoke, and laid my hand on her shoulder. My innocent sister, how unsympathetic she must think me.

"Gundred, you do not know," she said, sadly.

"Well, Persis," I said, "I am glad you return his love, for I am sure he will be a good and true husband"—then she bent her dark

stately head and kissed me.

"Thank you, Gundred; your words and quiet

calm voice seem to have a soothing effect upon

me, dear," she said, her eyes wandering dreamily away to where the river turned, and was lost to view behind a mass of trees and underwood.

"It seems a pity to spoil the first day of your betrothal by indulging in gloomy forebodings. When is he going to tell papa?"

"To-morrow, Gundred. Would you love me just the same if you found that I was not the innocent girl you now think me?" she said, and there was a queer little catch in her voice.

"My dear Persis, I really think you must be ill, or your mind wandering," I replied; but I felt uneasy, although I smiled, for her words seemed to have a hidden meaning in them.

"You must not take any notice of what I say," she returned, and then we maintained a complete silence until we reached the grounds immediately surrounding our dear old house. "Do not mention a word to mamma until to-morrow, after Frank has spoken to papa. I do not feel equal to congratulations to-day," she observed hurriedly, as we entered the house.

She was a strange girl, I thought to myself that night, as I leisurely disrobed. What was the meaning of her wild talk—her peculiar manner? There was no doubt that she loved Frank, I felt; and something told me that in her great love for him lay the cause of her trouble.

Why was it that the cruel grey eyes and nonchalantly wicked face of that young fellow we had met in the fields at Gaer Wood Tower flashed before me like a living thing?

Lord Carlyon rode over again next day, and, after being closeted with papa for quite an hour, they both came into the morning-room where we were sitting, or, rather, I should say mamma and I, for Persis had never been still a moment, but had wandered about the room, picking up a book, to throw it aside next moment, then rearranging the flowers in a large vase that stood on one of the many tiny tables that adorned the room.

She was standing there, with the sunlight filtering through the leaves of the trees outside on to her fair flushed face and perfect form when they entered, and I could see the quick heaving of her bosom and the nervous clutch of her delicate hands on the flower she held as papa's voice broke the stillness that had fallen upon us.

"Persis, my child," he said, taking her hand and drawing her towards mamma, "I have heard with pleasure, greater than I can express, that Lord Carlyon has chosen you for his wife. Kate, I know they have your good wishes."

Mamma rose from her seat with eyes aglow with pleasure, though there were tears in them, and her soft low voice trembled slightly as she stooped and kissed Persis, who had knelt down by the lounge.

"Dear Persis, I hope you will be happy; it will not be Frank's fault if you are not," she whispered gently.

Frank alone was silent, but I knew how deep was his joy as I gazed into his pale, but handsome face. He found voice, however, presently to whisper something to his fiance, and when they passed out of the long French window I do not know which flushed the deeper red.

"I am glad, indeed, that she loves him. I have fancied sometimes that she was flirting only; but I was mistaken. By-the-bye, have you any idea where she got that ring? I don't remember ever having seen it before," said papa.

"No, papa! at least I do not know the name of the giver. It was a present from a school-fellow, she says."

"Rather a costly gift for a school-girl. It looks a trifle old-fashioned, more like a family jewel than a new thing bought as present," replied mamma.

"Oh, perhaps it is a ring belonging to some girl's great-grandmother," I laughed.

"Then she ought not to have accepted it. I should be greatly displeased with either of you girls if you were to give away any of our family jewels," said mamma, as she turned and left the apartment, leaving me alone.

I sat pondering over the events of the past few days, taking no heed of the bright, beautiful morning, until Persis's voice aroused me.

"Frank said good-bye to me at the end of the Larch walk," she said, "and I want you to come

out with me and discuss our dresses for the ball."

"But, you know, Denzil will be here in half-an-hour," I replied, and I felt the colour rise and fade in my face with every beat of my heart.

"Oh, never mind about him; leave word that he is to come to us by the river, or by the lake, it is cooler there," she answered, and so I left word with mamma that he was to follow us.

We did not commence the dress discussion until we reached the borders of the lake. We stopped now and again to pluck some fair blossom that trailed across our path, or to listen in silent wonder to the soft clear notes of some tiny feathered songster as it soared gaily up against the cloud-flecked sky, or to watch the dragon-flies with their lovely gauze wings, as they buzzed past our heads in the bright sunshine.

It was a lovely day, intensely hot, with a soft, balmy, flower-scented breeze that breathed gently over us like a whisper from Heaven. The trees scarcely moved in the soft air, and the golden and white lilies, with their broad, dark shining leaves, lay perfectly motionless in their still, silver bed.

Seating ourselves underneath a great oak we leant back, and gazed dreamily at the fair scene before us.

The lake on the opposite side was bordered with laburnums, and their branches bent gracefully towards the water's edge, making a natural arch. The delicate bloom was just fading; beyond were undulating fields, in all their rich emerald greenness, and over all the sun shone down in a warm, golden flood.

"Gundred, I am going to wear deep rose, pink, and pearls," remarked Persis, breaking the silence that I had wished could last.

"I think I will wear blue, pale blue, and diamond and turquoise ornaments," I replied, rather absently, for my mind was not on dress. I was wondering how soon my lover would come, and even as I wondered he came along the pathway to our right.

The blood surged to my face and my hands trembled, and I could scarcely speak; but I felt that my love spoke from my eyes, for he smiled a quick, bright smile of pleasure, and caught me to him, pressing a kiss, fervent as any he had given me on the first day of his return, upon my willing lips. The birds caroled forth a gladsome song, and the tall rushes that grew up out of the water near the lilies bent and whispered softly to the golden and white flowers, and the rustle of the leaves overhead sounded like a faint fairy-like melody.

"My darling, you are pleased to see me!" he said, as we strolled away, leaving Persis deep in a book she had brought with her. "I can see you are, your eyes tell me some sweet tales at times, my love," he continued, and in my great joy I had no words wherewith to reply.

We wandered on by the margin of the still, clear lake, he whispering the old, old story, and I listening in a sweet, soul-felt silence. I thought of Burns's lines,—

"The birds sang love on every spray," as I heard them singing so gaily, for surely it must have been love that rendered their notes so thrillingly sweet and soft.

"Have you heard of the engagement between Persis and Lord Carlyon?" I asked, presently, as we sauntered back to the spot where we had left my sister.

"No, I have not," replied Denzil, "but I am exceedingly pleased to hear it now."

"It has always been mamma's wish and hope, so the course of their true love bids fair to run smooth in places, does it not, Denzil?" I said, and as I spoke that shiver of impending evil came over me, and then a horrible thought came to me. Supposing while I was fancying evil and sorrow for my lovely, innocent sister, these wardings and presentiments were meant for myself? "Oh, Denzil, my love!" I cried, clinging to his arm, "nothing can ever come between us!"

He started and paled at the righteous entreaty in my tones, and his voice was not steady as he replied, taking my face, from

which I knew the blood had receded, leaving me pale as death, between his hands.—

"Nothing but death can come between us, unless you are faithless!"

There was a solemnity in his tone, and a grave earnestness in his face and manner that ought to have carried conviction with it, and, in the after time, have helped to keep down the jealous doubts and fears that racked my brain; but to err is human, and though at that moment I was reassured, I—but let my story tell how his love was repaid.

"You think me very stupid, I am afraid, Denzil," I observed, as we came in sight of Persis, who was lying on the long grass, one arm thrown above her dark head, with its crown of glossy black hair, the rich, red lips slightly apart, and the long lashes resting on the flushed cheeks, forming a perfect picture of ease and indolence—a picture of wondrous beauty.

Denzil did not make any reply to my remark, but pressed my hand as he smiled down into my upturned face.

"So, Persis, I hear that you are an engaged young lady," he said, with a smile, as he threw himself down on the soft grass.

Persis looked up from her book with a bright, pretty blush.

"Yes, Denzil; I thought that Gundred looked so happy over it that perhaps I might venture," she answered, trying to hide her shyness beneath her saucy words.

"But do you love him, Persis?" asked Denzil, gravely. "Never give yourself to so base and paltry a thing as a loveless marriage—a marriage for a mere title."

"Denzil!"

Only that one word, but we could both detect the ring of wounded feeling in the cry, and then she threw her arms round me and sobbed.

"Forgive me, Persis," said my lover, gently; "but I fancied from your words, which you will own were a trifle flippant, that you cared only for his title—that the offer had dazzled you."

"That could never be, for I think we Sherbournes are as good as the Carlyons every bit, and I could not marry a man I did not love. Ah! Denzil, I do love him!" she said, raising her face, all flushed and tear-stained, from my shoulder.

"I believe you, my pretty sister, and I think he is worthy all the love you can bestow upon him," he returned. "Is this your engagement ring?" he added, taking her left hand in his, and turning it round; but as his eyes fell upon it, flashing and sparkling in the sun, he started, and rose to his feet with a slight exclamation of dismay. Persis rose also, and they stood there, those two—my lover and my sister, both with pale, startled faces, and wide, startled eyes.

"You are not well, Denzil," said Persis, recovering her equanimity in a moment.

"Where did you get that ring, Persis?" he cried, and his voice was hoarse and strained. "Tell me, where did you get it?"

"This ring!" she said, glancing carelessly at it, and holding out her hand so that a ray of sunlight fell athwart it. "It is a gift from a school-fellow. Why do you wish to know?"

"Oh! I do not know; it reminded me of one similar to it, which a dear friend used to wear," replied Denzil, in an indifferent tone; but an instinct told me that there was a weightier reason than the one he had given for his strange agitation at sight of the innocent bauble, and the calm beauty of the day lost half its charm in the rush of conflicting thoughts that came over me as we three walked slowly back to the house.

CHAPTER III.

It had been raining heavily all the morning, and, by the look of the sky, I guessed that there was plenty more to come down. I had ensconced myself comfortably in a roomy armchair, and commenced to read, when Persis, who never could amuse herself, came into the room

with a slightly discontented frown on her fair brow which detracted somewhat from the natural beauty of her face.

"Gundred, whatever shall we do with ourselves to-day if it goes on raining like this?" she said, coming to my side and taking the book out of my hand.

"Do with ourselves!" I echoed, with a smile. "Why, cannot you do some fancy work, Sis, or read?"

"Fancy work!" she exclaimed scornfully, "I hate it, and as for reading, I never could understand how anyone could sit hour after hour poring over the loves and trials of imaginary people, no matter how well it might be written."

"You lose a great pleasure when you give up reading, and you are not bound to read love tales," I replied, seriously, and taking no heed of her impatient movement. "There are books of travel, books of science—"

"I tell you, Dred, I detest reading!"

"Then what is it you want, Persis? Why not practice that new cantata that Frank brought over yesterday?"

"I do not feel inclined for music."

"Well, what do you wish to do? I am ready."

Laying aside the book which she had handed me back I rose and stood beside her, waiting to hear how she would propose to while away the hours before dinner, when Denzil and Lord Carlyon would be with us.

"Come up to your room and show me your new jewels," she said, coaxingly, and so we wended our way up to my own apartments.

I could not help being amused at her innocent delight as I placed the costly gems I had received from time to time before her.

"Let us go down to my room," she urged. "My glass is in a better position than yours, and so to humour her I consented.

"This is pretty," I remarked, holding up a handsome diamond necklace. "It is one of Denzil's gifts."

"Fasten it round my neck," said Persis, putting up her left hand to hold it while I did so.

"Why, Sis," I cried, "the setting is the same as that ring of yours. Look at this peculiar scroll round the edge!"

She turned white, and her lips drooped as I spoke; then, with a hasty gesture, she tore the ring from her slender white finger.

"I will never wear it again!" she cried, passionately. "It has brought me nothing but misery. I suppose it is a just punishment; but you," turning her great eyes reproachfully upon me, "you might leave me in peace."

"Persis," I exclaimed, lost in wonderment, "whatever is the matter with you lately?" and after that I could only sit there in my cosy blue velvet chair and stare helplessly before me out of the window, from which I could see the river and the hills that had looked so fair and sweet a few days before beaten about by the heavy rain.

"You are the most inquisitive set of people was ever my lot to see. Why, at school I did as I liked, wore what I liked, without absurd questions of 'Why, Persis, where did you get that?'" she went on, passionately, walking to and fro the long room, nervously clasping and unclasping her white hands.

"Persis," I said, quietly, looking straight into her big brown eyes, which looked now almost black, "you are not vexed like this because I made that remark. There is some other and deeper meaning to your strange conduct, though what I cannot say."

I remember now the startled look she gave me, and how she paused in her walk, and stood before me with an expression on her face which told me that there were depths in my sister's character it were best should never be sounded, an expression I had never seen before, and never wished to see again, for it filled me with sorrow.

"You speak with such assurance, Gundred, it were a pity to spoil your little dream by contradiction," she said, haughtily.

"Persis," I cried out, impatiently; "your behaviour is strange beyond all speaking. Why this passion of heroes because we dare to ask you who gave you a ring, which is peculiar enough to attract anyone's notice? Is there any dread secret connected with it?"

"None," she returned; but her lips tightened as she uttered the one word, and she glared almost in hatred at it as it lay before her on the soft, thick, blue carpet. "I do not know even why I wore it. I have no affection for the giver; in fact, my feelings are more inclined towards dislike," she added, with such an air of indifference that I believed her.

"It were a pity to lose it," I said, stooping to pick it up; and as I did so I saw Persis stoop also and clutch eagerly at a tiny square of note-paper which lay at her feet, as though it had just fallen there. I did not make any remark, as I supposed it to be some poetic effusion of hers, for Persis was given to writing passionate love poems and dreamy bits about autumn and winter.

"You are going to open the ball 'with Denzil!'" she said, taking no heed of my remark about the ring. "I have promised Frank the first dance."

"Of course," I replied, then I walked to the window and gazed out at the surrounding country, which, despite the rain, looked fair indeed. The long grass seemed to have gained renewed life, and lay like a deep emerald carpet before my eyes. The bright rain-drops fell on to the tall flowers, sending a shower of diamonds over their pale leaves as they bent beneath the weight, and wafting their sweet subtle perfume to us as we stood there at the open window; the birds too, as they hopped from bough to bough, the rain-spots on their dark wings not brighter than their saucy round black eyes, seemed to be so joyous, carolling forth such sweet snatches of song that my heart leaped in response.

"You look as though you were enjoying yourself," exclaimed my sister, impatiently.

"And so I am," I returned. "Just listen to the birds, and inhale the sweet smell of the pines, and then say there is no pleasure in a wet day. Does the air ever seem so fresh as after a shower? And see how green and bright the earth is now."

"I do not feel poetical to-day," laughed Persis. "I really think I must have an attack of dyspepsia, I feel so captious."

"Who is that down by the river?" I cried, as I caught sight of a tall, well-knit figure sauntering slowly along in the drizzling rain. "Why, it is Denzil! How stupid of him to walk so slowly; he will get wet."

"No, it is not Denzil," said Persis, slowly, and looking at her I saw that she had grown deadly pale, and she drew back into the shadow of the curtain. "It is—it is the—"

"It is the stranger whom we met in Lord Carlyon's grounds," I interrupted. "But what is he doing here? Do you know that even now I can trace a certain likeness to Denzil in his carriage. How strange that he should come here! Has papa given permission, or is he unaware of the fact that he is trespassing?"

"Well, I am sure it cannot injure us for a stranger to walk in our grounds when we are not there, and in the rain, too. I pity his taste."

Persis turned away as she spoke, and walked to the door.

"Are you going down?" I said, and she merely nodded her dark head, and closed the door after her.

I stood there for a few minutes watching the mysterious stranger. He glanced once or twice at the house, and once I could have declared he raised his hand, as in token of recognition of some one; but that was fancy, of course.

He turned and retraced his steps after a time, and presently disappeared from view behind the trees that were so thick down by the river.

I walked away from the window towards a bookcase that stood facing the door of the drawing-room; the glass satin draped door was open, and putting up my hand, I took a volume down at random. I opened the leaves carelessly, but

the words I saw written on the flyleaf caught my attention, and held me spell-bound—

"To PERSIS SHIRBORNE,
In token of affection
From her lover,
GERALD BRANGEGROVE."

Her lover! This, then, was the secret that Persis guarded so jealously. "Oh! Persis, Persis, why could you not confide in me? Why not have told me before I discovered it like this?" was the cry that rose to my lips.

I laid the volume down, and with a fixed determination in my mind sought Persis. She was sitting, or rather reclining, in the roomy depths of a large velvet lounge, her feet daintily poised on a footstool, pretending to read, for her book was lying closed on her lap, and her eyes were fixed, with a faraway expression in them, on the bushes outside the drawing-room window.

"Persis," I said, going up to her and kneeling beside the lounge so that I could see her face, "you never told me you had a lover at school."

"A lover at school!" she repeated, looking at me with scared eyes as she rose to a sitting position, and pushed the heavy dark masses of hair from her brow with hands that trembled visibly.

"Yes," I said. "Who is this Gerald Brangrove who gave you books and styled himself your 'lover' on the fly-leaf?"

"Oh!" There was a sigh of relief in that tiny monosyllable.

"Well, Persis!" I said, inquiringly, as she continued silent.

"You want to hear about madame's nephew. He was a tiresome young monkey. I accepted his love just as I did his presents, because it served to pass away many a tedious hour. We used to have such fun in that quaint old garden at St. Cloud. I wish—"

Then she paused, with an expression on her beautiful face which plainly told me those last words were a mistake.

"And that is all!" I asked, eagerly. "There was really no love on your part, my sister?"

"None," she answered, setting her teeth together firmly. "None, I assure you. If I ever think of him now it is with disgust," and I saw by the flash in her eyes and the deepened colour on her olive cheeks that her words were true.

Then my idea was only the wild idea of a suspicious brain. After all, why should she not have a lover; it would be the more wonderful if, possessing such wondrous beauty, she had no lovers.

Mamma coming in then put an end alike to our conversation and my thoughts, and then we went up to our own rooms to dress for dinner.

That evening, to my surprise, we were all standing in the drawing-room after dinner, when Denzil drew Persis towards the open window, and when I would have followed, he turned to me with a grave, courteous smile, saying,

"I wish to speak to your sister alone, Gundred."

A burning flush rose to my very hair, a flush of wounded pride and love. He had neglected me sometimes, but never had I offered my company and been repulsed before, and I felt a choking sensation in my throat as I wondered if the others had witnessed that little scene.

It had long ceased raining, and the stars shone in silver radiance up in the clearly dark sky, so high above our heads, and the tall trees waved and rustled in the night breeze like the sound of distant seas.

I could see Persis and my lover standing at the end of the terrace, she with upraised pallid face, he with grave earnest demeanour stooping over her as though pleading for some boon which she denied.

There was a look of determination on her lovely features, and the beautiful red mouth was closed, and wore a hard expression I did not care to see.

She raised her white hands suddenly, with a quick, passionate gesture of refusal, and he turned impatiently away.

I could not bear it any longer, and going over to where mamma was sitting playing too I whispered to her that I did not feel well, and could not stay up, and then I crept up to my room, where I sat far into the night gazing with hot, tearless eyes at the deep dark sky, with its thousands of wonderful lights twinkling and blinking in unsympathetic beauty.

It was the night of the ball, and Persis, who looked more radiantly beautiful than ever in her trailing silken robes and gleaming jewels, was standing in the centre of the immense ballroom, talking and laughing with a circle of admirers. I could not help noticing her perfect sang froid, and thought of my first ball, when I was almost too shy to answer even when addressed; but I could hear from where I stood with Denzil, in the deep shelter of a bay window, her rich full voice giving back jest for jest, quick bright sallies that caused those around her to laugh with true heartiness.

"Your sister is looking very lovely to-night," remarked Denzil, carelessly, lifting the soft lace curtain aside to gaze out at the moonlit landscape, but I saw his eyes glance towards that merry group as he continued, still in apparent indifference, "There will be some broken hearts to-morrow," and he laughed a little harshly, I thought.

"She is very beautiful," I replied, "but I hope she is not a coquette, as your words would imply."

"Indeed, Gundred, I did not wish you to take my words in that sense, though at the same time I fancy she is a coquette," returned Denzil, quietly.

"Well, if she is it is not your affair, unless you think she will try to break your heart," I said, sarcastically.

I felt ashamed when I saw the look of sad reproach in my lover's eyes.

Just then the band commenced some dreamy waltz, that had in its very strain an air of Eastern voluptuousness, and the surroundings—gaily attired, lovely women, tall, splendid men, sweet, fragrant exotics, and glittering lights—all tended to soothe my ruffled feelings, and a calm, intense joy came over me as I whirled round the room, clasped tightly in my lover's arms.

When the dance was finished Denzil led me to a seat, and then crossed over to where Persis stood, talking to Lord Carlton, who was looking very sulky indeed, and not attempting in the least degree to entertain his partner.

"You promised me the next dance," I heard Denzil say, in his grave voice, and Frank looked round with a haughty flush on his handsome, debonair face.

"Of course I did, Frank; you must have the next," she returned, easily; but Denzil bowed, as he replied quietly,

"If you have forgotten, and given it to Frank, I can wait until you can give me one without offence to any one," and he smiled and half turned away.

"Pardon me, Eiadale, I would not have Persis guilty of such a rudeness for the world, and I dare say it will prove as pleasant to her," said Frank, in a bitter undertone, as he walked away to the farther end of the room, where he stood leaning against a marble pillar, festooned with bright, odorous flowers and dark foliage, watching the dancers, a dark, angry expression resting on his brow.

I could see him well as I gallantly went through the maze of the "Lancers," and I felt a painful choked sensation in my throat as I watched the angry expression change to one of positive sorrow; and following the direction of his eyes I saw Persis and my lover pass out of the ballroom, and down the long wide corridor that led to the conservatory.

"A kindred feeling makes us wondrous kind," and I longed to speak to him, to comfort him if I could; and making some excuse to my partner I crossed to where he stood, and placing my hand on his arm—I felt no reserve with him, my almost brother—asked him to take me to the conservatory.

We paced slowly down the brightly-lit corridor, with its exquisite painted panels and priceless

statues, and entered the conservatory in silence. There was a dreamy unreality here; the soft musical clash of many fountains fell pleasantly on the ear, and the air was filled with rare sweet perfume, intoxicating the senses and sending a dreamy languor through one's whole being. He paused beside a giant fern, whose long graceful fronds bent far out over the marble pavement, and putting his hands on my shoulders, gazed earnestly into my face.

"Do you fail to see it?" he asked, almost angrily, "or is it the natural sham, the mask-wearing of a woman?"

"Frank!" I cried, "what do you mean? What is there for me to see? Do you mean Persis? She is so young and her beauty attracts attention; can you blame her if her head is a little turned? She is not naturally a coquette."

My pleading words were spoken from my heart. It was really only the natural love of admiration which all beautiful women feel. Why should we expect her to be different from the rest? I ignored even to myself the too evident fact that she was now walking in the grounds with my lover, leaving her lover to his own devices.

"You plead well and plausibly, Gundred," replied Frank; "but I am not alluding to her coquettishness, and you must know that, if you are not blind."

"I am afraid, Frank, you have left your usual chivalry at home," I made answer; "but what then do you complain of?"

I was determined that no word or look of mine should condemn my sister, whom even now I felt was innocent of all blame. If there was guilt it was Denzil's, not hers.

"Why, that Denzil Eiadale, whom I have always taken to be the very soul of honour, is making love to one sister while he is engaged to the other!" he cried, passionately, clutching his hands till I thought the knuckles would come through the delicate skin.

I started back in horror at his words, though they only put into shape the jealous doubts and fears that had been haunting me of late; but it seemed so mean, so despicable a thing to imagine a man guilty of that my soul shrank from the thought.

"Oh, it could not be, it cannot be!" I moaned half aloud. "Denzil, my love, my life, whom I have thought pure and noble above all men—it surely cannot be!"

"Come out into the open air, Gundred," muttered Frank, taking me gently by the arm and drawing my shawl closer round my shoulders. "This place stifles me."

We walked about the grounds for some time in moody silence; then by a strange accident we turned our steps in the direction of the lime avenue.

As we neared the centre, where to the left, beneath a great lime, a seat had been erected, with a fanlight, pagoda-like roof, and supported by slender pillars, and now overran with some creeping plant—a passion flower I think it was—we saw that the seat was occupied by two persons, and by the light of the moon I could just see that the woman was Persis.

It was no difficult matter to decide who her companion was, for had not she and Denzil left the house together? Besides, Denzil's proud, erect carriage was unmistakable.

"Denzil and Persis," I murmured.

"Look there; what is the meaning of that pretty scene?" cried Frank, pointing to them, and taking no heed of my words.

"I have been cruelly deceived," I whispered. "But Frank," I added, rallying all my generosity and faith, "are we not judging them hastily. Is it utterly impossible for them to come for a little stroll without harm being made of it? You and I are here together, and we hold the same position towards each other. Do we not, Frank?"

"Gundred, you are a true hearted, brave little woman," he returned, taking my hand; "but see, you and I do not indulge in passionate embraces such as that, I think," he added, with grim sternness.

The two had left the pretty Lime Walk seat, and it was as they reached the open that the man caught Persis to him and held her there

close to his heart for a few seconds, and then they walked away, and were soon lost to view in the gloom of the shadow-giving lime.

"Oh, Heaven, my love, my lost love!" I moaned, staggering forward, and then the earth became suddenly dark.

I remember that as I fell I glanced upward, where the moon shone so serenely in her blue, star-gemmed home. I could see the stars twinkling through the quivering leaves as they swayed softly in the night air, and a bright silver ray of moonlight fell across Frank's face as he stooped forward with outstretched hands.

When I came to I was lying on the lounge in the conservatory with mamma leaning over me, her dear face white with anxiety, and Frank stood beside her, his face no less white, his eyes dark and sombre-looking in their pain, his eyes set hard.

The whole expression of the bright, careless, debonair face was altered. No one could complain of the want of manliness now. I would have given worlds to have banished that look, but I knew that nothing in this world ever could seem the same to him again if Persis were false. His love was great as mine, and my life was ended with the breaking of my love-dream.

"Are you better, my child? It was the heat of the ballroom," said mamma, pressing a kiss on my cheek. "You have been over fatiguing yourself."

I glanced gratefully at Frank. He had led mamma to believe that I had only just left the dancers. He returned my look with such a grave sad smile.

"You can leave her with me now in perfect safety, Mrs. Sherbourne," he said; and so mamma, who was really required as hostess, left us, turning back to say,—

"Have you seen Denzil and Persis? I thought they were in here."

"No," replied Frank, mechanically, uttering a deliberate falsehood.

We neither of us spoke when we were alone, but sat there with eyes that saw not, staring at the frothing waters of a fountain that stood near, and just as Frank was about to break the silence we heard a light, happy ripple of laughter, and the next moment Denzil and Persis entered by the window.

Denzil glanced sharply at me, and then I suppose he saw I was not well, for he came across to my side, and took my hot hand in his own.

"Tired!" he whispered, lowering his voice to that soft tone that was so dangerously sweet, and even though I felt then that he was acting a part, my heart beat quicker and my pulses leaped, so weak is woman when she loves with such intensity as I did.

"Yes," I replied; then raising my eyes to his face, I added, "Did you and Persis enjoy your walk in the lime avenue?"

He turned deathly white, and catching at the head of the lounge with one hand put the other quickly to his heart. I was startled at that grey pallor, but it served only to confirm my doubts. And then his voice—all the sweetness and music had gone from it, and when he spoke it sounded stern, almost harsh.

"Denzil!" he cried, catching my hand, "I swear by all that is true and pure on earth, by the love I bear you, Persis and I have not been together this evening. We met at this end of the lime avenue, near the house."

Persis was standing before me with a face so full of bitter sorrow that I was puzzled; but still we had stern facts to go upon, and rising from the lounge I answered my lover's words.

"Oh! Denzil! Denzil! Why did you not trust me?"

"I can scarcely disbelieve the evidence of my own eyes!" I replied, scornfully, standing before them with flashing eyes.

I could scarcely speak, for my breath came in short, quick gasps that stirred the jewels on my bosom.

"You can believe whatever you please, wa—sor!" cried Persis, in her usual ringing tones; and just then the music in the great ballroom ceased, and a few moments after laughing merry voices sounded down the long corridor, and this put an end to our discussion.

We did not again speak to each other that night, and when the guests had departed and Persis and I stood alone in the deserted ball-room amid a dreary scene of faded flowers, torn gloves and ribbons, with the garish light of day struggling through the chinks of the venetian blinds, she looked so wan and miserable that I could not find it in my heart to upbraid her then. So we said good-night there, and sought our own apartments.

I felt tired, fatigued, but not sleepy, and so, instead of at once seeking my couch, I took off my dress and jewels, replacing them by a pale blue robe de chambre, then throwing the window open I knelt on the deep window-seat and gazed out at the slowly waking earth.

The sun was just beginning to rise, and a faint pink glow showed in the sky above the tall pines in the wood beyond the river; the birds had just awakened, and were bidding each other good-morning in perky, piping twitters as they fluttered to and fro in the beautiful old trees.

A drowsy hum of insect life was in the air too, and gradually the sun rose over the pine-wood, changing the dull grey of the morning sky to a deep gold, that faded and blended imperceptibly with the rich crimson light that sank low behind the dark mass of trees, and as gradually a feeling of peace stole into my heart then I rose; shutting out the glorious picture with the heavy silken curtains, I sought my couch.

CHAPTER IV.

"PERSIS, what explanation have you to give me?"

My voice was hard, cold, unyielding as was my heart. How else could I feel towards this too much worshipped sister, who had repaid my love and trust with such cruel treachery—treachery of the worst kind; for I knew that she loved Frank, and that she was merely playing with my lover's feelings, trying to win him from me for the mere love of coquetry! That mocking reply of hers on the previous night had put her conduct in quite a different light to me.

She was reclining on a soft velvet lounge in the morning-room, a picture of graceful ease. There was no guilty flush on her proud face, no change with the exception of a slight pallor, which added to rather than detracted from her marvellous beauty.

Leaning her head back more easily against the soft cushion she regarded me steadily for a few moments, ere she replied.

"What explanation is needed, my pretty sister! Do you know that I have never seen you look so well in anything as you do in that pale blue robe? and then excitement suits you. You calm, statue-like women always look well when roused."

This was all uttered in a languid tone, as she reclined there, with a soft smile hovering round the scarlet mouth, one delicate, jewelled hand toying carelessly with the fringe of the cushion on which her dark head rested.

She looked so cool, so carelessly indifferent, that for a moment my heart and pulses stood still, and I felt that I could kill her as she lay there, in her nonchalant beauty, with that smile upon her face.

"Persis!" I cried, passionately, "Is your heart made of stone that you can lie there, with a smile on your face, knowing that you have ruined my life?"

"Ruined your life!" she echoed, lifting her eyebrows and altering her position, so that she could lean her head upon her hand. "I fail to see it."

"And not only mine, but that of one of the trust and best men it will ever be your lot to know," I went on; "for if ever woman broke a man's heart you have broken Frank's."

"Broken Frank's heart! How?"

Ah! now she was moved. A startled look came over the smiling face, and she rose to a sitting position, putting out her hands to me, as though in supplication.

"How have I broken Frank's heart?" she

repeated. There was no carelessness in those piteous, quivering tones. I felt rejoiced for a moment, and then my better nature asserted itself. She, too, suffered from her folly. She was greatly in fault, but she had her punishment; and so my reply was spoken in a gen'ler tone.

"Do you not know that we saw you and Denzil in the lime avenue last evening?"

"Save me and Denzil!"

"Yes, I wish you would not keep repeating my words. We saw you both sitting on the seat there, saw him draw you to him!"

"Hush, you are sure it was I!"

There was a fixed look of determination on her pale face, as she rose and stood before me, proud.

"I could, we could scarcely both be mistaken," I faltered, my conviction a little shaken by her manner.

"My dear suspicious old sister, you were both mistaken," and as she stooped and kissed me, that enchanting smile broke over her lovely countenance, chasing away the hard look from the mouth, the shadow from the dusky eyes.

"But," I urged, "your dress, Frank and I—"

"Nay, dear, I swear that I never went near the lime avenue with Denzil," she said, earnestly.

"You left the ball-room together."

"And he went to the smoking-room, I on the terrace to look at the moon."

It was hard to disbelieve the evidence of my own senses, harder still to doubt my sister's honesty. Yet, when I left her some few minutes later, as I beheld Frank's well-known figure coming along the pathway, I felt a strange misgiving at my heart.

There was something more here than could be seen on the surface, and I could not read between the lines.

There are wheels within wheels, and I felt that some unseen wheel was turning the course of our lives in a drear, miserable direction.

Frank's young face wore such a grave, sad expression when I met him in the hall. He greeted me with a smile though, and held out his hand, but he did not speak.

"You will find Persis alone in the morning-room," I said, laying my hand on his arm. "She has explained our absurd mistake, Frank."

A pleased smile flashed all over his face at my words, and it lingered there even when he opened the door of the room where my sister awaited his coming.

I had not seen Denzil yet. He was staying with us, but I had asked to have my chocolate in my own room; so it was with a mingled feeling of pleasure and pain that I met him when I joined those assembled in the library.

"Will you come for a stroll with me, Gundred?" said Denzil, putting his hand on my shoulder and gazing into my upraised eyes with an earnest, intent gaze.

"Yes, Denzil, with pleasure. I wish to speak to you particularly," I replied, and in a few moments we started.

"Now, what is it you have to say to me?"

Denzil paused beside a tall rose-bush, on which some bright raindrops glistened like tiny jewels, for we had had a slight shower in the early morning, and waited with that quiet, grave manner I knew so well for my answer.

"We were both mistaken—Frank and I. Persis was not in the lime avenue last night."

"Did she tell you that herself, with her own lips?" and as he put the question my lover's face grew sterner.

"She did, Denzil, but why do you ask?" I replied, a vague pain stealing into my heart.

"Oh, I do not know," he said, putting his hand, with that sudden, quick movement I had often noticed of late, to his left side.

"Are you vexed with me, Denzil?" I asked, wistfully raising my face to his.

There was no one to see the mute appeal for the kiss he had not given me, and I was in the

wrong. The longing for peace between us was so great I felt as though my heart would burst, and still he stood there with that grave look on his loved face, over which had crept a grey pallor stealing all the life from it. Oh, would he never forgive my unjust suspicions?

He held out his arm as though with the intention of leading me back to the house, saying as he did so,—

"I am glad you and your sister have come to an understanding. It is not a pleasant sight to see sisters quarrel."

"Denzil, my love!" I cried out in despair, all my natural timidity and reserve vanishing at the dread thought of losing him. "Will you not forgive me?" and stooping forward, he had sank down on a seat near the rose-bush, I pressed my lips to his in a soft sweet kiss.

That kiss seemed to rouse all the old love, for his face flushed, his eyes brightened, and I felt his heart beat in quick heavy throbs against my own as he caught me to him with passionate exclamation.

And so we were once more reconciled; but I noticed that Denzil appeared ill at ease all that day, and Persis was not at all herself. Those wild, almost boisterous spirits did not deceive me if they did others. There was something amiss in my pretty innocent sister's life, but what I could not guess. Would to Heaven I had been given the power.

A dark, clear, moonless night, the stars shining in their usual brilliancy up in the sky, but lending no light to the calm, slumbering earth.

No sound save the occasional chirp, chirp of some grass insect, and the gentle lap, lap of the dark, broad river against the grassy sloping banks.

Yes, there was another sound, the swift rush of the night wind through the tall pines and ancient funeral firs and elms, sweeping first with a cold, quick current over me, then dying away in a soft murmur, somewhere among the fluttering leaves.

I could feel the gentle caress of the willows as they bent and rustled and whispered to the rippling river, touching my head ever so softly now and again as I walked along filled with forebodings.

I had come out here to meet Denzil, who had gone over to Gaer Wood Towers, and it was long past the time he had told me to expect him at, but I still lingered, hoping he would come.

Presently my steps led me across the bridge that spanned the river, and I found myself on the verge of the whispering pine wood, and paused a moment to listen to the sound I loved so well, the wind sweeping in strong soft gusts, like an ocean harp, through the long branches of the tall trees, between whose branches, too, I could see the stars gleaming in their far-off home.

As I stood there, a dark figure against still darker surroundings, I heard voices some distance off, and fancying it was Denzil returning with a friend I hurried forward; but I came to a standstill before I had gone a hundred yards into the dusky tree shadowed wood, for it was a woman's voice, full-toned and clear, that of my sister Persis, whom I had supposed lying down in her own room, that was borne to me on the fresh night gale—and her companion was Denzil! I saw his face blanched to deathly grey pallor, and heard his voice changed almost beyond recognition, but my lover's voice beyond all denial.

Persis, pity hear my prayer. It is not for myself alone that I ask you to do this, but if it goes on it will ruin more lives than one; if it ends now only one will suffer."

They could not see me as I pressed forward. I wore a dark green velvet robe, and the thick trunks of the trees screened me from their view, and the soft moss did not betray my footstep. Perhaps it was the act of a mean mind to play eavesdropper, but my excuse lay in the fact that I had been deceived more than once. I would not give them the chance of so doing again.

What could Denzil mean by those words spoken in that low, concentrated, passionate voice? They could have but one interpretation. He was plead-

ing for her love, and she, what would her answer be, I wondered?

Then her voice fell slowly on the silence that had succeeded his prayer, during which I could hear my own heart beating so loudly that I had drawn back in fear that they would hear it.

"How can I grant your request? I love him so, Denzil. I love him so. How can I? Oh, how can I?"

She threw her hands out, then covered her face and sobbed—oh, so bitterly. Strange words those. What did they mean? They did not sound like the reply to a lover's proposal, and yet what construction could I put upon their actions?

"You must see that it cannot go on like this. There must come an end sooner or later," replied Denzil, and now his voice sounded cold and harsh.

"Let me know some joy. Pity me, Denzil. I would do much for your sake, but leave me in peace a little longer, and then I will give him up."

Her voice was low and sad, and I saw the beautiful proud head droop wearily towards him.

"Persis, you will do this. I have your promise," he exclaimed, eagerly, as he put his arm round her.

"I promise," she whispered.

In my utter misery I forgot where I was, for got that I was an eavesdropper, everything, save that those two who should have been my dearest friends stood before me convicted of the foulest deceit and falsehood, and in my excitement I stooped forward.

My feet coming in contact with a bush of laurel recalled my wandering sense, and, turning, I ran with the fleetness of a hunted hare back to the house, nor paused till I reached my own apartment, where, after locking the door, I sank down on a lounge in a paroxysm of wild, tearless agony.

Then after a time I grew calmer, and, sitting up, I endeavoured to think out this strange mystery. Why should Persis give up her lover at Denzil's request if she had no love to give him?

I sat there with my hands pressed tightly to my throbbing temples, a strange, numbed, faint feeling stealing over me, trying to collect my thoughts that would wander away to the first evening of my lover's return, when all earth seemed so bright; then to the night of the ball, and so to this most miserable evening, and there I came to a standstill.

Try as I would I could not solve the mystery; and so, with a deep sigh, I rose, and singing the bell told my maid to excuse me to mamma and our guests, as I was very tired after my walk.

I had fully made up my mind to one thing, that to-morrow should end all, that the engagement between me and Denzil must be broken off. This determination was arrived at when my pride began to assert itself; and so on the following morning I sought an interview with the man I had thought pure and noble above all men.

Never shall I forget my feelings as I stood beside the still, clear lake, looking away over the green hills, struggling for strength to speak my words proudly, yet quietly.

The lilies, with their golden and white cups, swayed gently among their dark leaves as a cool, fresh breeze swept across the hills, and sent the water in a thousand ripples up the fern-strewn, grassy banks.

There was a calmness in the air; a peaceful, never to be forgotten day it was, with the soft peacefulness of twittering birds and drowsy humming insects, the gentle whisper of bending, graceful quivering reeds and weeping willows.

A faint, misty haze rested over the distant hills and the sweet, low sound of church bells was wafted to us as we stood there facing each other alone with our own thoughts and sorrows.

I loved him even now. Such love as I had given him could not be quelled in a moment; though the deep respect, the veneration, I might say, were gone, the love still remained, and I could have cried aloud to die ere I spoke the words that meant something worse than death to me.

I broke the silence at last, suddenly, abruptly; if I had stayed to choose my words I think I should have fainted.

"Denzil, this must come to an end," I cried.

He had put his arm round me, and drawn my head down on to his breast, and the touch thrilled me as no other touch ever had or ever would again; but this very weakness gave me strength (so contradictory is human nature) to speak those words; and so, drawing myself away from his embrace, I spoke them hurriedly but distinctly.

He grew very pale at my words, and put his hand to his heart, a habit of his when agitated, I had noticed of late.

"What must come to an end?" he asked, staring at me with pain-widened eyes.

"This nonsense, Denzil. You cannot possibly wish our engagement to continue, seeing that you love my sister," I replied, almost jestingly.

I felt quite hysterical, and could have laughed aloud. Now that the ice was broken a wild, passionate longing came over me to appear calm and cold.

"Gundred, what has made you so indifferent, so suspicious?" he cried. "Why have you altered so lately?"

"Why have I altered?" I repeated. "It is you who are changed. I—Heaven help me!—I love you still."

And then I paused; in my bitter pain and sorrow I had forgotten my woman's pride, and in my mortification a great calmness came to me, and when he spoke I even smiled, coldly and restrainedly, but still I smiled.

"Then, if you love me, why break our engagement? Nay, not a word of Persis; that is a paltry excuse."

"Did I say I loved you still? That was a mistake, I meant the remembrance of what has been still has power to move me. But I think it is scarcely proper to allow things to go on as they now stand," I said, coldly, regarding him with an icy, fixed expression, though the blood was coursing madly through my veins, and my heart throbbed almost to suffocation.

"Gundred, you speak in riddles; cannot you be straightforward for once; but, there, I suppose it is asking an impossibility of a woman if" he cried, taking my cold hand in his, and gazing into my face with the old gaze; but now his eyes were dim with pain, and that grey pallor had overspread his working features.

"I saw you and Persis in the wood last evening, and heard part of your conversation, quite enough to show me how deeply deceit is rooted in man's nature. Could you not have come to me and honestly said, 'My love has flown from you, it is your sister whom I wish to marry?' I would gladly have released you from an irksome bondage; but no, it caused you less annoyance and trouble to make love to us both; and again, I daresay, it tickled your manly vanity to hear me tell of my love."

"Hush!" Denzil had stood with folded arms and down-bent head while I poured forth this torrent of words in calm, even tones. His face had become very quiet, and only by the twitching of the firm mouth beneath the silken moustache could I see how he was moved.

But I went on pitilessly, still in that calm measured voice that even to my own ears sounded cruel; but he had shown no pity to me, why should I spare him! So heedless not that word in which I felt there breathed a world of agony I continued.

"And so when I come to you and ask why you have behaved so, you would even then try to cover me into the belief that I am mistaken. You men cannot forego one titillie of what you consider your rights—the right to make woman's heart a toy to amuse you when other pleasures play—noble pastime, truly!"

"Gundred, Gundred, hear me!" he cried, taking a step forward, and raising his right hand to the blue-grey sky above our heads, from which the sun shone in pale-straggling beams. A stray shaft fell athwart his face as he lifted his eyes, so dark with bitter sorrow; and looking at him standing there, so noble-looking, so full of grand

proud manhood, I wondered how such things could be, how one to all outward seeming so pure, could be so base at heart.

"I am listening," I returned, quietly.

"Gundred, I swear by the love I bear you—oh, darling I do not smile so scornfully—that I have never spoken one word of love to Persis. Ask her. There she comes, ask her! She must in justice explain!"

He spoke with feverish haste, and hurried forward, and, turning, I saw Persis coming slowly towards us, a bright smile playing round her full red lips, and dancing in her great black eyes.

"In mercy's name, Persis, explain to Gundred that our meeting in the wood yesterday was a mere accident, and not the assignation of lovers." I heard him say, and then I joined them.

"What is it you wish me to say?" she asked, languidly, letting her long dark lashes rest on her crimsoning cheeks.

My lover glanced surprisedly at her, as he answered, impatiently,

"Do not trifl, Persis. Did I ask you to meet me in the wood yesterday for the purpose of declaring my love to you? Did I speak one word of love?"

"Then why seek a secret meeting?" I interrupted.

"Gundred, I did not intend to meet your sister until I dis—" he paused here, and I waited for my sister's reply.

Persis turned her dusky eyes slowly on me, and then a look of intelligence—I cannot quite explain the look—flashed into them. She was so regally beautiful, so different to any woman I had ever seen before that even I, a woman, was fascinated by her loveliness. Could I blame Denzil?

"You do not wish me to repeat all our conversation, surely," she said, lifting her white lids, then drooping them again, with a faint shyness in her manner.

I felt the meaning in her words, and glanced straight at Denzil, who clutched at a waving branch of the willow, opened his lips as if about to speak, then closed them again, staring the while at my sister, with a look almost of horror in his dark eyes.

"Persis has given you an answer," I said, coldly.

"Well, he did not ask me to come to the wood with the express determination of making love to me; of that I am assured," replied Persis, with a rippling merry laugh.

"You have told me all I wish to hear," I returned. "This is the end of all," and, as I spoke, I slipped my engagement-ring off my finger and placed it in Denzil's hand, and turned away, leaving all that is brightest and best on earth behind me—youth, love, and happiness. The future lay before me—a wild, drear, barren waste, the cold waste of a loveless, disappointed, spoiled life.

(To be continued.)

If the surface of the sun were a thin, external ring, or shell, and the earth were placed in the middle of this hollow sphere, not only would the moon have space to circle in its usual orbit without ever getting outside of the solar shell, but there would be room also for a second satellite, nearly as large again as the moon, to accomplish a similar course. The weight of the sun is 300,000 times the weight of the earth, or, in round numbers, 2,000 millions of millions of millions of millions of tons.

The complexity of animal structure is marvellous. A caterpillar contains more than 2,000 muscles. In a human body are some 2,000,000 perspiration glands communicating with the surface by ducts, having a total length of ten miles; whilst that of the arteries, veins, and capillaries must be very great; the blood contains millions of millions of corpuscles, each a structure in itself; the rods in the retina, which are supposed to be ultimate recipients of light, are estimated at 30,000,000; and Meissner has calculated that the grey matter of the brain is built of at least 600,000,000 cells.

THE HEIRESS OF WYNDCLIFF.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT BEFELL ELAINE.

It is now time to return to Elaine, and see what her movements really were on the morning of her disappearance. It will be remembered that after she discovered the theft of the packet of old letters she had taken from the chest in the muniment room, she found lying on the dressing-table a scrap of paper much gnawed by mice, which proved to be in her grandfather's handwriting, and was in reality the most important of all the documents—or, at least, on reading it, she imagined it might prove so to be.

For reasons that have before been stated she said nothing of her discovery to Gerard, and her father being much too unwell to be consulted she had to trust solely to her own devices in carrying out the plan on which she had determined. Sir Richard's condition provided her with a good excuse for not accompanying Lady Alma and Gerard to the county town, and after seeing them safely off in the wagonette, she returned to the library, and carefully studied the greatly dilapidated document which was destined to have so important an influence on her fate. Part of it was nibbled off—the beginning and end, it would seem, but the writing that remained was clear and distinct, though some of the letters were shakily formed, as if the hand that penned them had been weak or tired.

"Whether I did right in yielding to my wife's request concerning the jewels, I know not"—ran the paper—"but so distraught was I at her death that I was incapable of forming a calm judgment on the wisdom of my proceedings. Now that I know I am myself near death I see matters differently, and it seems to me I have no right to keep from my heirs the knowledge of where the jewels are hidden, more especially as they are of no great value, and the Wyndcliff estate is encumbered as it was not years ago. This being the case I have determined to write the secret to my son, who will not open this letter till I am dead, and thus shall I keep my promise to my beloved wife that never should the words betraying where they are concealed pass my lips."

Here followed a portion of the manuscript so gnawed by the mice as to be quite undecipherable and only held together by the margin. The next words that Elaine was enabled to make out were evidently the continuation of a sentence, "and the entrance to the vault is through the chapel. The middle panel of the altar, which looks as if it were wrought in solid stone, is in reality movable, and answers to a spring, which can be worked by pressing upwards the Tudor rose sculptured in the centre of the embossing. This secret entrance has been in existence since the Civil Wars, when the priests were ever on the alert for secure hiding places, and the knowledge of it has been handed down from father to son in the Wyndcliff family. But to my son Richard I never betrayed it, in accordance with my wife's wishes, and after her interment in the crypt I caused the other entrance, which was an open one and well-known to the household, to be bricked up, so that the vaults should remain intact, and there should be no danger of thieves finding the jewels. I have heard it reported that there is yet another ingress to the vaults through the room known as the Muniment Room, but though I have looked for this I have never been able to discover it. Doubtless an investigation of old family archives would give the key to it, but I have had neither time nor inclination to search them, nor do I see what good the knowledge would have done, since those troublous times when men's lives hung in so uncertain a balance that it behaved them to provide safe hiding places for themselves are happily past and over."

"And if my son Richard is of opinion that these jewels should be applied to the freeing of the estate, then I have naught to say against his decision, although for myself I hate the very sight of the diamonds, and fully believe there is a

curse on them. I believe, too, that my wife, in her heart, shared this opinion, although her woman's vanity would not let her admit it. My promise to her only bound me for my life, and did not apply to my descendants. And he will find them"

With these words, the paper came to an abrupt end. Still the sense seemed clear enough. The jewels had been hidden in the vaults. The Rances (as the lady of Wyndcliff Castle had been called) had insisted on this being done after her death, and had bound her husband to secrecy, with what motives it would be impossible to say.

Elaine's heart beat high with hope. She had now little doubt of her ultimate success, though she acknowledged she might have many difficulties to face. At the same time it seemed certain the jewels must be still in their original hiding place, and their discovery would mean the freeing of her father from debt, and the paving of the way to her own union with Gerard Carew.

It was likely enough she would have to appeal to her lover for help before her task was complete, but she need have no hesitation in going to him now; that she was provided with such positive evidence. He could not accuse her of of romantic dreams and visionary fancies, since here in black and white she had proof that the famous diamonds had been put in some secure hiding place by her grandfather.

Her first action, the young girl decided, must be to go to the chapel, and see if she could find the secret passage alluded to, and now was her opportunity.

It was by no means certain that, having discovered the panel, she would be able to move it aside, seeing that the springs would most likely be stiff and hard to work after the lapse of so many years. Still there would be no harm in trying, and Elaine straightway went into the hall, snatching up her white sailor hat as she passed.

To make quite sure of her facts, she glanced once more at the paper before thrusting it into her bosom, and looked up at the clock to see what the time was.

Not yet twelve o'clock. She would have a good hour and a-half before luncheon.

It was then the butler saw her, and as it happened she met no one else on her way to the chapel, the key of which she had in her pocket.

After entering she took the precaution of locking the door on the inner side and taking the key, so as to guard against all chance of intrusion; and having done this she went up to the altar, stepping over the withered little bud that lay on the stones in front of it, but not noticing it in her precipitation.

Yes, there was the carved Tudor rose, not in any way conspicuous from the surrounding sculpture. Elaine's face was very pale as she knelt in front of the panel and pushed the rose upwards with all her strength. So much depended on the success of her venture!

To her great astonishment the spring not only answered immediately to the pressure but moved on one side as easily and silently as if it had been constantly in use, or had only recently been oiled. The aperture disclosed was large enough to permit a man's entrance, and without the least hesitation Elaine passed through, and found herself in a narrow passage which presently led to a flight of steps, at the bottom of which was an open door.

It was very dark, but the girl had taken the precaution of providing herself with a box of matches and a candle, which she at once lighted and held high above her head, gathering her skirts about her with her left hand, so that they should not come in contact with the walls, which were damp and slimy and covered with fungi.

The air of the place was close and suggestive of unwholesome colonies of bats and spiders, and once Elaine trod on something soft and yielding which seemed to move beneath her foot. She sprang aside with a little cry of disgust to find she had stepped on a huge bloated toad.

The incident gave her an unpleasant sensation, and for a minute she was almost tempted to turn back. But the impulse passed directly; since such serious issues depended on her going forward.

At the bottom of the steps she found herself in a large and lofty chamber which was apparently hollowed out of the earth, and built of solid masonry. The walls reeked with noisome moisture, great festoons of spiders' webs, to which clung the insects themselves—grown to an enormous size—hung from the ceiling.

At intervals along the walls were ranged chests both of stone and wood, which had probably been formerly used as receptacles for ecclesiastical garments, and, most gruesome sight of all, above them, on shelves built in the walls themselves, were coffins, some of which had been so affected by time and damp that they had rotted away, leaving visible within the moulder bones of their occupants.

Elaine turned her eyes from the grisly spectacle with a stifled cry of horror, and then walked to the extremity of the chamber, which she resolved to thoroughly explore before she left.

More coffins met her gaze, but these were stone ones, some of them finely carved, though the sharpness of the lines of the sculpture had been considerably blunted by the lapse of ages. And now she was confronted with the problem of what she was to do next.

As a matter of fact, the place seemed full of hiding places, and to explore them all would be a perfectly endless undertaking; yet the conviction that the treasure she was seeking was there had become more and more of a certainty, though it seemed unlikely that the frail strength of a young girl would be able to discover it.

Elaine decided she must take her lover into her confidence and get him to assist her. If possible she wished to keep all knowledge of the quest from Sir Richard, lest it should end in disappointment. Not that she for a moment permitted herself to dwell on such a possibility, but her father's health was too delicate to run any sort of risk.

Her only plan now was to go back—and indeed she would be glad enough to get out of this fetid atmosphere, and see the glad light of Heaven shining from the blue sky.

As she turned to retrace her steps she stumbled over some obstacle on the broken pavement of the floor, and in throwing forward her arms to save herself the candle she held fell from her grasp, and was extinguished before it reached the ground, leaving her in total darkness.

Elaine was fairly brave, as she had shown by her action in coming here, but it must be confessed that she did not at all relish the position—alone in the darkness, in the midst of the gruesome denizens of the crypt, afraid of turning either to right or left lest she should tread on some uncanny object.

She fumbled about for the matches, but to her consternation could not find them, and then it struck her when she lighted the candle she must have let the box slip to the ground instead of into her pocket, as she had intended. This being so, nothing remained but to grope her way back to the chapel as best she could. But in the utter darkness that reigned she had lost her bearings, she knew not whether to turn to right or left, and a dim consciousness of the horror of her position began to fasten upon her, making her shiver with an apprehensive dread.

Suppose she could not find her way out after all! "Cry as loudly as she might she would never succeed in attracting attention, and the secret of the entrance to the vault was unknown to any living creature beside herself.

"Courage, courage!" she whispered, beating down her fears with a strong effort; "I have to depend on myself, and it will never do to despair at the outset. No Wyndcliff was ever a coward. I won't be a disgrace to my line."

She waited for a few minutes, hoping that when her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness she would be able to distinguish the outline of objects surrounding her, and while she thus stood she heard from behind a faint sound as of metal touching metal.

It must be admitted the sound gave her a pretty severe fright, and she had much ado to stand her ground without letting any sign of fear escape her lips. But her heart beat so loud and fast that it seemed as if it must choke her, and great beads of moisture stood out on her

brow. She was so helpless there in the darkness, so entirely at the mercy of any assailant. Supernatural terrors began to assail her; suppose indeed the spirits of those dead monks whose bones lay, mouldering in the coffin, were permitted to come to earth again—suppose. . . . She dared not go on with the terrifying thought; by sheer effort of will she forced it from her.

"There are no such things as ghosts," she said to herself. "If that noise were not accidental it was produced by human agency."

Hardly had the idea formulated itself in her mind before she distinctly heard the sound of a step, and a minute later a dazzling ray of light was flashed straight into her eyes.

With a shriek of terror the frightened girl shrank back, and at the same time a man's voice said, reassuringly,—

"You need not look so alarmed, Miss Wyndcliff. I shall not hurt you."

It was Hilliard, her father's secretary, who spoke.

The revulsion of feeling was so great that poor Elaine almost fainted under it. Hilliard, however, proved equal to the emergency, and produced from his pocket a small silver flask containing brandy, a few drops of which he poured down her throat, while he made her seat herself on one of the stone chests against the wall. As soon as she recovered it struck her that he was looking at her in a curiously intent and pensive manner, as if debating some mental problem within himself.

"Did you mistake me for an apparition?" he asked, forcing a smile to his lips—that was somehow contradicted by the anxiety of his dark eyes.

"I did not know what to think; but as a matter of fact, I did not see you at all until after you spoke. I only heard your footsteps, and saw the light you carried."

"Ah, my lantern," he returned, glancing at it as it stood on the chest by Elaine's side. "Of course it astonished you; but how was it you were in the dark?"

She described to him the incident of the candle falling, and pointed to where it lay on the ground.

"Have you been here long?" he asked, abruptly.

"I don't know exactly how long, for it is hard to judge time under such circumstances as these; but I left the Castle sometime before twelve o'clock."

"And you came alone?"

"Quite alone."

He looked at her furtively from under his lowered lids—a glance that made her feel strangely uncomfortable.

"Doubtless Sir Richard will be alarmed if you don't return soon."

"Yes, I had better lose no time in getting back," she answered, rising as she spoke. "Although my father does not know I am away from the Castle it is quite possible he may want me."

A swift light leapt into his eyes. If she had only known how fatal an admission that was!

"Then you came entirely upon your own initiative, Miss Wyndcliff! That was very brave of you. I suppose you did not wish to take anyone else into your confidence, because you desired to keep the secret of the panel in the altar?"

"Was that the way you came?" she queried in her turn.

"Certainly," he replied, telling the lie with unblushing effrontery—for he had really come through another secret passage leading from the muniment room—and had been as surprised as he was alarmed at finding a second person already in the vaults. After a moment's hesitation he added, "I chanced to see you enter the chapel, and I followed you. Of course, when I saw you pass through the panel I knew at once you must be contemplating a visit to the vaults of which I have heard and read in your family papers, and I did not think it was safe for you to be here alone."

"That was very good of you," Elaine returned, warmly.

She did not like Hilliard, but she was the

most grateful creature in the world for any act of kindness done her, and too guileless herself to suspect guile in others.

"I suppose I was rather foolish to venture, but I acted on impulse, and 'All's well that ends well,' though I really don't know what I should have done but for your providential appearance. There is one favour I would ask you before we leave."

"What is it? If it be in my power to grant it, you may rely upon my doing so."

"I wish no one to know of the entrance to these vaults. At the present moment the secret is confined to our two selves. And now let us go back to the Castle."

In all innocence poor Elaine had betrayed herself. As she took a step forward Hilliard stood in her way, and barred her progress.

CHAPTER XV.

HILLIARD SHOWS HIS HAND.

"Wait a moment, if you please, Miss Wyndcliff," said the secretary. "Before we return to the Castle I should very much like to know your object in coming here. It could not have been mere curiosity, or you would have brought a companion with you."

His tone was not insolent, but there was in it a note of quiet authority which Elaine deeply resented. She drew up her head with considerable hauteur.

"What my object was does not concern you in the very slightest degree, Mr. Hilliard, and I have not the least intention of divulging it."

"Excuse me, I am the best judge of that. But if you will not give me the information I ask perhaps I can give it to you. You came here to find the Rane's jewels."

"How did you discover that?" she exclaimed, thrown off her guard by the quickness of his retort. The moment the words had passed her lips she regretted them, for of course they amounted to a tacit admission of the correctness of her surmise.

"I know a great deal more than you give me credit for, and added to that, I am both willing and able to help you in your task. The jewels are certainly here. All that remains is to get them."

He was looking at her very intently as he spoke, studying her expression so closely that not the slightest variation in it escaped him.

But Elaine was more vigilant now than she had been heretofore. She did not know how far she could trust him; her doubts, once aroused, were not easily set at rest.

"We will continue our conversation when we have left this place, Mr. Hilliard," she said, hastily. "The atmosphere is beginning to affect me. Let us get out of it with as much speed as we can."

Once more she tried to pass, and again he prevented her—this time with an exertion of actual physical force.

The colour flamed to Elaine's face, her eyes flashed angrily. She was no spiritless creature whom the least tyranny could abash, but a girl of strong will, and immense powers of determination, in spite of her delicate physique. If Hilliard had hoped to coax her by his manner he was disappointed.

"How dare you behave thus to me—how dare you keep me here against my wish!" she cried, passionately. "Let me pass, sir, or it will be the worse for you!"

"Softly, softly, Miss Wyndcliff. Remember that these heroes will avail you nothing at all. You are here alone with me, and virtually in my power. Now I do not wish to make myself unpleasant to you, but I wish to know how you got your information concerning the jewels. It is a matter of vital importance to me. Directly you tell me this I will let you return to the Castle."

"And why should I tell you what is not, and cannot be, any concern of yours?"

"We will leave that out of the question. Say it is my whim to know—a whim that it will not hurt you to gratify. Have I not told you that

in return for your information I will do my utmost to discover the jewels?"

"I do not require your assistance, and I absolutely refuse your request," was the unequivocal answer, and as she spoke the girl's hand involuntarily pressed the bosom of her dress, where her grandfather's dying confession lay hidden.

The movement was an unfortunate one for her. Hilliard's eyes at once noted it, and caught its significance. He immediately resolved to get the document—for of course he guessed it to be a paper containing writing—into his possession. The time for hesitation was passed. He was playing a desperate game, and only a bold stroke could win it.

He came nearer, and caught her right wrist in his grasp. The light of the lantern flared up into his face, showing the stern setting of the mouth, the fixed determination of the dark eyes. It seemed to Elaine that a different man from the calm, somewhat taciturn, but invariably courteous secretary, confronted her at that moment—a different man, and a dangerous one.

"We need not bandy words any longer, Elaine Wyndcliff—we have not time for it. I will come to the point. You have concealed in your dress certain directions concerning the jewels, and those directions I desire to see. I give you the option of handing them to me yourself, or allowing me to take them."

"I shall do neither," Elaine returned, defiantly; but though her words were bold enough, her heart hardly matched them. She recognised how truly he spoke when he said she was in his power, and the yawning darkness of the skeleton-haunted vault emphasised the fact in an extremely unpleasant manner. Yet old traditions still exercised such a spell upon her that it seemed actually impossible this salaried dependent of her father should dare to use force in taking her preciously guarded letter out of her possession.

His next action showed her the mistake she had made. His grip on her wrist became firmer, and she saw that in another moment he would have torn the paper from her.

She cast a swift glance at the position of the lantern, then, with her disengaged hand, pulled the letter from her dress, and pushed it straight into the flame. With a muttered oath Hilliard released his hold in order to snatch the burning paper, but she threw herself in his way, and contrived to prevent his reaching the lantern until the morsel of blackened tinder within showed him the futility of his efforts.

"Well," he said, at last, looking at her with a sort of sullen admiration, "you have shown more resources than I gave you credit for; but all the same, they won't avail you much. Although you have destroyed this document you have no doubt committed its contents to memory, and it will be as easy for me to act on your verbal instructions as on some one else's written ones."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I shall keep you here until you repeat to me every word that was written there," indicating the blackened flakes with his finger.

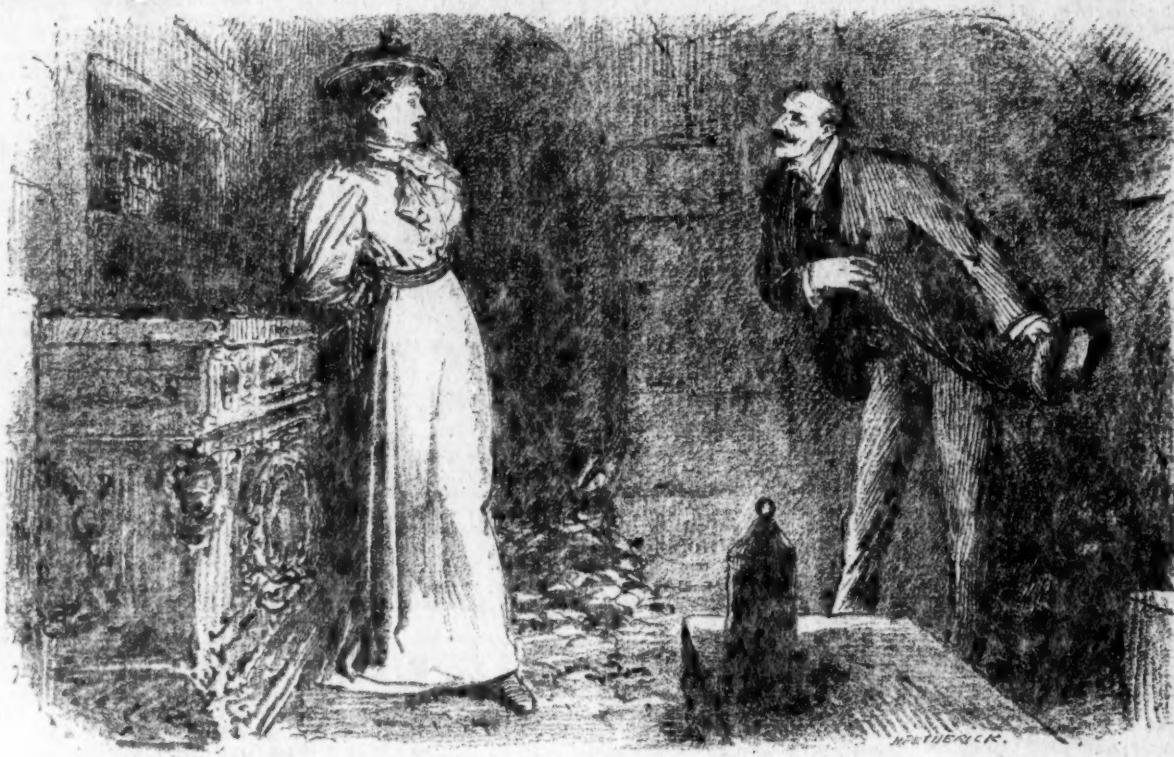
"You would not dare!" cried the girl; but he simply shrugged his shoulders.

"My daring goes much further than you imagine. You will see, as time goes on. I assure you I mean every syllable I speak."

"But think of the risk you run—my father's anger—"

"You forget," he interrupted, with a sardonic smile, "that your father has not the least glimmer of suspicion where you are, and that if he thinks of these vaults at all, it is as of a place that has been bricked up, and unseen of human eyes for many a long year past. Of course your absence will be discovered—that I am quite aware of, and prepared for, and if there is a search I shall be one of the foremost to take part in it. But I warn you, I shall take good care no one visits the chapel or the vaults, except myself, and when I come it will be by a passage unknown to any other person."

Elaine involuntarily sank down on the stone chest, feeling sick and faint with terror. Could



HILLIARD, WITH A MOCKING BOW, RETIRED, LEAVING ELAINE ALONE IN THE VAULT.

she hold out, she wondered, against such a threat as this?" For a few minutes she did not speak, then she said,—

"But in the end discovery is inevitable, and you will have to face it."

He smiled in an inscrutable manner. When discovery came it would affect him very little, seeing that the ocean would roll between him and his pursuers. He could afford to ignore such a far-off chance.

He took out his watch, and looked at it by the light of the lantern. Time was getting on. He must hasten back to the Castle lest his absence and Elaine's should be discovered simultaneously—which was a possibility he was especially anxious to guard against.

"Once more, Miss Wyndcliff, I ask you, will you give me the information I require?"

"I will not!"

The words were spoken firmly enough, and Elaine did not blench as she met his eyes.

"Very well, then, I must leave you, and by the time I return you will perhaps prove more amenable to reason, only I am afraid, before I go it will be necessary to take precautions against your escape; so, although I regret it very much, I have no alternative but to bind your hands, and thus secure you," and as he spoke, the scoundrel took from his pocket a short length of rope, with which he proceeded to tie her wrists behind her back, afterwards making her a mocking bow.

"I shall leave you the lantern. I have no desire to behave more harshly to you than I can help—and now *au revoir*."

Not a sound escaped Elaine's white lips until the last echo of his footstep had died away, and the intense silence that reigned told her she was alone. Many girls might have been maddened with terror at finding themselves in such a position; she, on the contrary, was so filled with indignation at the slight put upon her that at first wounded pride left room for no other feeling. Naturally enough, her first efforts were directed to trying to free her hands, but they

were so well secured that she soon became convinced her endeavours were absolutely useless. Then she rose, and began once more to examine the vault by the light of the lantern, which she took between her teeth. The door through which she had entered she found had been closed and bolted on the other side, so escape by that way was clearly impossible. There might be another mode of egress, but this she could not find, and after wandering about for some time, she at length seated herself on the old stone chest, and began to feel rather hopeless.

Not quite though, she knew that directly she was missed a rigorous search would be instituted both by her father and her lover, and her trust in both was unbounded. They would not leave a stone unturned in their efforts to discover her hiding place; but there was always the possibility to be faced of their not thinking of the chapel, and then indeed her case would be desperate enough.

As for Hilliard she need expect no mercy from him, unless she acceded to his demands. But what, after all, had she to tell him? Only that she knew for a certainty the jewels had been deposited in the vaults, and of this he seemed to be already aware. Thinking over his career at the Castle by the light of his present knowledge Elaine decided that he must have taken the post of secretary with the deliberate end of finding the jewels in view. How he had heard of them in the first place she did not know; but she called to mind his interest in all the old deeds relating to the family, his frequent exploration of the Castle itself, and his reticence concerning himself—all pointing to the same conclusion.

Moreover, she now felt sure that the bit of wax she found adhering to the key of the muniment room chest was due to his manipulations. He had somehow contrived to abstract the key from the possession of her father—who had likely enough been drugged during the process—and had taken an impression of it, so that he might have a duplicate manufactured. It was doubtless he who had oiled the springs of the panel in

the altar, so that it slipped back easily, and moreover, on the morning when the young girl had brought Carew to see the chapel, and they had both been startled by the sound of a groan, Elaine surmised that the secretary was answerable for their alarm.

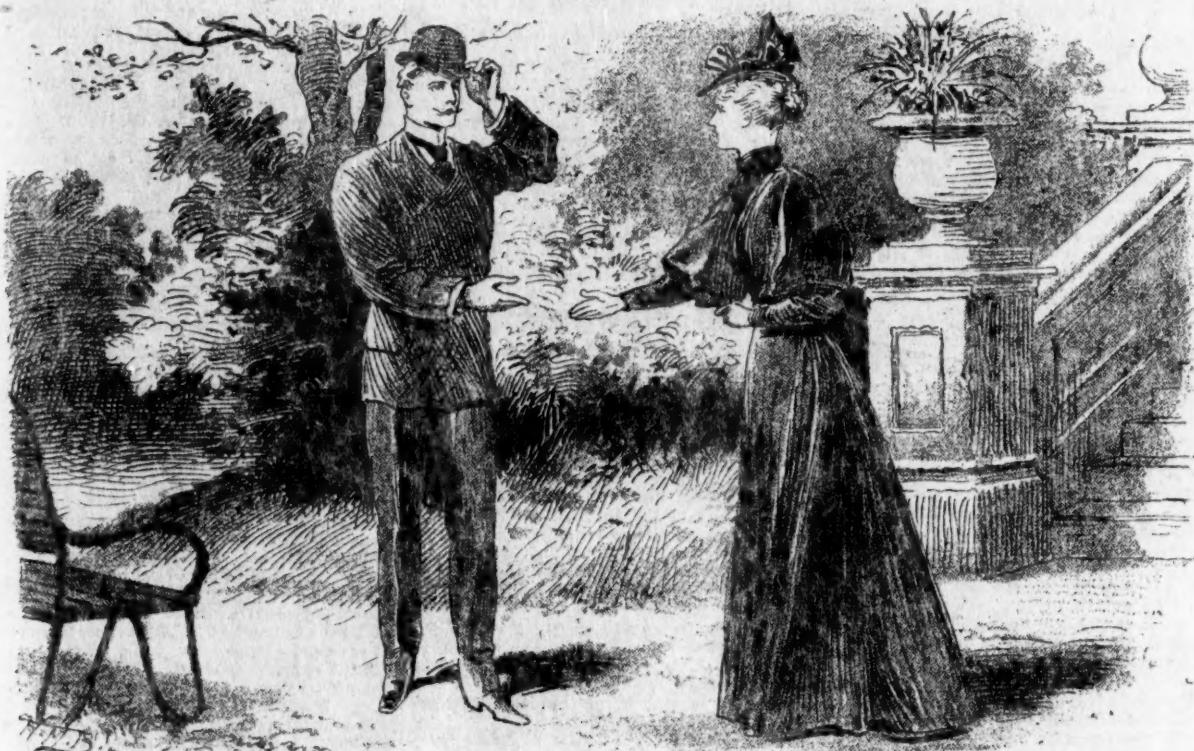
This was indeed the case. Hilliard had entered the vaults and had been on the point of coming out when he cut his finger against a jagged bit of iron, and, all unconscious of the presence of intruders in the chapel, had not tried to restrain the groan that his pain wrung from him. Luckily for him, however, he had delayed his exit from the altar panel until after the visitors had left, but on his way to the door a drop of blood had fallen from his fingers on the rosebud that Carew had later on come back to find.

Elaine was shrewd enough to gather from his words that he was playing for no less a prize than the Ranees' jewels. She put little faith in his promise of liberating her after she had imparted to him the contents of her grandfather's letter, for they would serve no definite purpose in guiding him to the jewels, and he would know the impossibility of hoping to stay on at the Castle after she had told her tale to her father. So that while it was clearly to his interest to keep her alive so long as he had hopes of obtaining information from her, it would be quite the other way round when he had once forced her to betray her secret.

As this awful reflection flashed upon her poor Elaine's fortitude gave way. She was under no sort of delusion now with respect to the secretary's true character. He was a desperate man, who would hesitate at no crime that tended to serve his purpose—and she was in his power!

(To be continued.)

REPTILES and fishes are not generally provided with eyelids, these protections being to them unnecessary.



"I AM SO GLAD TO MEET YOU," MARJORIE SAID FRANKLY, AND WITHOUT APPEARING THE LEAST CONFUSED.

A GREY DAWN.

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CHAPTER V.

To his life's end Dr. Gordon never forgot that August morning, every detail of the little rural railway station seemed burnt into his memory. Earlston was perhaps the smallest station within seventy miles of London. Its arrangements were primitive in the extreme, one official combining the duties of station master, ticket collector, and booking-office clerk, while the only waiting-room was a slip nine feet square, scorching hot in summer, icy cold in winter, and altogether not in the least calculated to add to the comfort of passengers,—and yet this room was to witness the crisis in two lives.

The window was dirty and begrimed with dust and the marks of rain drops, the chairs were hard and uncomfortable, the round table contained for all literature a religious tract announcing that hell fire awaited all those who did not agree with the tenets held by the writer. It was so hot and stuffy that Andrew longed to fling open the window, but Doris was lost to all sense of physical discomfort. She sat exactly where Dr. Gordon had placed her, and seemed blind and deaf to everything around her.

"Doris!"

He spoke her name quietly and almost tenderly, he was so sorry for her, poor little thing; he felt so deeply for her he would gladly have left her in peace and not tried to rouse her from her apathy till her poor numbed brain had rallied from the shock; but alas! time was flying, the hour before the train was due would pass all too quickly, and before they left Earlston they must have arrived at some conclusion respecting her future.

Doris opened her grey eyes a little wider and turned them towards Dr. Gordon. It was the only sign she gave of having heard him speak. He went on kindly,—

"You must not trouble about that woman,

Doris, and what she said. I assure you such a creature as Mrs. Ward is not worth a second thought. I want you to trust me, Doris, and tell me your wishes for the future."

"Wishes!" the girl repeated, wearily, "I have not got any. If Marjory were here she would believe in me, but she is in Yorkshire. I don't even know her address."

"I might be able to find it out," said Dr. Gordon. "If her uncle is a local magnate it would not be difficult to trace his address; it would be in the list of Yorkshire landowners. If I can discover where Miss Ward is, Doris, would you like to go to her?"

"No," Doris shuddered. "If Marjory had been here I should never have been treated so cruelly. But she could do nothing for me now. The Major always lets Mrs. Ward have her own way, he would not dare to take me back now, and if Marjory knew how things were she could not help me, and it would only embroil her with her step-mother."

That very thought had crossed Gordon's own mind. With the best will in the world Marjory was powerless, and her father, cowardly as his weakness seemed, was yet in a very awkward position. He might believe Doris and pity her, but how could he insist on keeping a girl who was no relation to him as an inmate of his house when his wife positively refused to receive her?

"What will you do?" he asked again. "Have you any friends who would take care of you for a time?"

Doris thought of Lady Maxwell, and for one moment suffered herself to hope; then the hope faded, Lionel was his aunt's idol, she would have neither pity nor kindness to spare for the girl who had refused him.

"There is no one," said Doris, in a cold stolid tone. "I know very few people in this neighbourhood, and the friends I had at Hartsleigh believe I am Major Ward's daughter. I could not go to them without explaining that I am a nameless waif."

Andrew Gordon's resolution was taken.

"We have known each other a long while, Doris. I think you trust me."

"I trust you perfectly," she said, gravely; "you were uncle David's friend, and you have been very kind to me."

His heart beat a little more quickly, she was so pretty even now in her distress.

"I want you to show your trust in me, Doris, by letting me decide your future. My dear, I am a good many years your senior. I am not rich or famous, I shall probably never be either, but I will do my utmost to make you happy if only you will come to me. Be my wife, Doris, and let me protect you against the whole world."

His wife!

Only three days ago another man had asked her to fill that place in his life. Sir Lionel had offered her love, wealth, admiration, her own heart had pleaded for him, but she had sent him away for Marjory's sake. Marjory loved him too, and her foster sister would not blight her life.

Sir Lionel had shown himself as he really was after his rejection, and had made Doris not quite sure she would have been happy with him. She had had a dreamy foreboding that if disgrace had fallen on him through her he would have hated her. It was all over now. Perhaps she had not really cared for him as much as she thought; but still the glamour of her first love made her reluctant to accept Dr. Gordon.

"It is very generous of you," she said to Andrew; "but you don't understand. Mrs. Ward will never rest until she has exposed what she calls my true character to every one; disgrace may follow me. Besides, there is another thing. I know nothing of my father. He may be a disgraceful connection, even a convicted felon. Think of the shame that may fall on you if you marry his daughter."

"I am not afraid," said Gordon, firmly. "Doris, there is only one thing which could make me hesitate."

"And that is!"

"If you love another I will not press my suit."

Dead silence.

Did she love Lionel Maxwell, or was her attachment to him of the past?

"There is no one in the whole world I want to marry," she said, at last.

"I know you cannot love me yet," said Andrew, gently; "but I think I can win your heart in time, so only that I have no rival."

"You have none."

"Then be my wife!"

"But it is so sudden. You can't possibly care for me. You must be doing it out of pity."

"How can you tell? Suppose I lost my heart to Mrs. Meredith's niece long ago?"

Another fear assailed Miss West.

"Your sister," she said in a low tone, "would not approve of it."

"My dear little girl, I have reached the age when a man marries without his parents' consent. I certainly should not ask my sister's; but you misjudge Agnes. It is her desire that I should marry. She has often recommended me to seek a wife."

Poor Doris!

Blame her if you will. She was houseless, homeless, friendless, and this man offered her the shelter of his name, the protection of his home; she knew that Andrew Gordon was true and loyal, a man whose word was his bond. There was no spark of love for him in her heart; but she dreaded the cold, cruel world, poor lonely little girl, and so she put her hand in Andrew Gordon's, and promised to be his wife.

Ten minutes later they were in the Brighton train.

Doris leant back in her corner with closed eyes, as though fairly worn out. The doctor was busy mapping out the preparations that must be made ere she could become Mrs. Gordon.

He had lived long enough in Brighton to constitute a residence. If he applied to the nearest surrogate he might obtain a license that day. They could, he thought (he was rather doubtful on this point) be married on the morrow; but even if a day's notice was required the ceremony could come off on Saturday, which would leave time for a two days' honeymoon before returning to Cedar Lodge, to release his *locum tenens*, and settle down to work.

His first act on reaching Brighton was to telegraph to his sister.

"Unavoidably detained; will write date of return."

Then he drove with Doris to a very select boarding house in the Marine Parade, with whose proprietress he had a slight acquaintance. He explained to Mrs. Grimstone that an unavoidable delay had arisen regarding his marriage, and begged her to receive his *faute* for one night or at most two, until the wedding could take place, which that pleasant little matron, whose name belied her nature, promptly promised, adding that Miss West should be taken all possible care of while her guest.

"You look tired out, my dear," she said, kindly, when Andrew had departed. "Now take my advice, go upstairs and lie down. I'll bring you some tea and toast; then try and go to sleep. You shall be called in good time to dress for dinner, and after a nap you'll feel quite a new creature."

Doris was only too thankful to obey her. When the tea and toast had been swallowed Mrs. Grimstone folded a light shawl over the girl with her own hands, drew down the blind to darken the room, and was just leaving her when Doris said, brokenly,—

"What makes you so kind?"

"My poor child, you can't have seen a great deal of kindness to think so much of mine," was the reply. "I am fond of girls, Miss West, and I always feel an interest in engaged girls. I made a runaway match myself, and though it is ten years ago, and I have had a very happy married life, I can't quite forget how lonely and desolate I felt in the few hours between leaving my father's house and wearing a wedding-ring; and somehow it struck me your wedding was

just a little like mine, and that you might feel as I did then."

"I do feel lonely," confessed Doris, "and it is all so sudden."

"I like Dr. Gordon," said Mrs. Grimstone, impulsively; "but I can't bear his sister. You take my advice, Miss West, insist on having your home to yourself. There's nothing like getting things of that sort settled. If Agnes once stays on with you you'll find it hard work to get rid of her."

But Doris was so far from being in love that she had not the least desire to have Andrew to herself, and never dreamed of suggesting his sister should leave Cedar Lodge; in fact, Doris felt as if she herself and not Agnes were the interior.

They were married on the Saturday. Mrs. Grimstone was delighted at the delay, for she assured Doris no one could possibly be happy who was married on Friday.

From first to last she took the greatest interest in the affair, even to going to church and letting her two little girls stand behind Doris in the fond belief they were her bridesmaids.

Doris West looked very pretty on her wedding-day, but Mrs. Grimstone felt a dire misgiving as she watched the faces of the bridal pair. There was nothing lover-like about Dr. Gordon. There was no shy girlish love beaming in Doris' grey eyes. It was a run away match, and certainly a disinterested one, but the kind-hearted little woman who looked on felt terribly afraid it was not a love one.

"We will stay at Brighton till Monday," Dr. Gordon said to Doris when they had returned to the hotel where he had been putting up since that memorable Thursday. "I am sorry we have so short a honeymoon, but we must go home then, because I am due at Clapham."

Doris said "Yes," and betrayed neither pleasure nor regret. Then the doctor told her a little about Cedar Lodge, how he had purchased the lease with the goodwill of the practice, otherwise it was not a house he should have chosen.

"It is too large for one thing," he said, "and to be comfortable there one ought to spend a good deal of money. Agnes always declares a substantial looking house is half the battle for a medical man, but I often think I would rather have a smaller nest, which I could make more home-like than all those big empty rooms I cannot use; but my sister is a wonderful manager, and makes the best of things."

"She seemed very clever," said the poor little bride. "Oh, Dr. Gordon, I do hope she will not be angry about me."

"You foolish child," he said, smiling. "Why should she be angry? I am my own master, I hope. I do not mean to take Agnes quite into my confidence, Doris. I shall tell her the Major was away, and your step-mother was very angry, so I thought it best to take you into my own keeping."

"You mean you will let her think still that I am Doris Ward?"

"That you were Doris Ward," he corrected; "you have been Doris Gordon now for a few hours, little lady. Yes, I think it is best in every way. It will spare you a very painful explanation, and Agnes, well Agnes is just a little inclined to be ambitious."

"I would much rather she knew the truth," said Doris. "Supposing she finds it out by accident?"

"Oh, she won't," said Andrew with all a man's desire to escape a painful scene; "and if she does she'll have grown so fond of you by that time that she won't mind."

"Shall you write and tell her we are married?" asked Doris, a little anxiously.

"Oh, yes," he returned cheerfully. "I'll write to-night."

But he found the letter by no means an easy task. If he had told Agnes everything it would not have been so hard. Now the very knowledge that he was keeping something back made his words stiff and constrained, and his letter when it reached Miss Gordon was not calculated to smooth her ruffled feelings.

"MY DEAR AGNES,—

"I return home on Monday evening, and my wife with me. You told me the other day I ought to marry, and even suggested Doris Ward as a suitable choice, so you will not condemn me for taking your advice. Mrs. Ward behaved abominably about—that matter. Seemed to think the poor girl got stranded at Brighton on purpose. There was no telling when the Major was expected back, and I couldn't leave Doris at his wife's mercy, so I married her out of hand."

"Of course this will make no difference to you, my dear sister. Doris is far too young to attempt to take your place. You will be mistress of the house, and things will go on just as usual, only you will have a pleasant companion when I am out or busy. In short, I am sure you will see that this step is the best I could possibly have taken."

This letter reached Clapham by the first post on Monday morning when Miss Gordon had had time to feel decidedly neglected at her brother's strange conduct. She read his letter through twice, and then folded it up with a jerk.

"Gordon's a fool, a born fool. He is not in love with that girl, every line shows it. So why in the world did he marry her? It's no use his telling me it was for her five thousand pounds, for he never did a prudent thing like that in his life, so it isn't likely he'd begin it now! 'The best step he could possibly have taken,' he calls it. I would describe it as the maddest. Well, one thing is certain. He is not quite satisfied with his own conduct or he wouldn't defend it so vehemently to me."

"And coming home to-night. He might have given me longer time to prepare people for the news. It will be a nine days' wonder."

And then by way of beginning the wonder she turned to the *locum tenens*, who was breakfasting with her.

"Andrew is coming back to-night, Mr. White, and he has stolen a march on us; he is bringing home a wife."

Mr. White opened his eyes to their widest extent and delivered himself of only two words,—

"Good gracious!"

CHAPTER VI.

GEOFFREY FAIRFAX listened to his step-father's will, and yet more to the codicil, with amazement and dismay. He had been perfectly sincere when he told Major Ward he did not expect to be Sir James's heir.

He understood the Baronet thoroughly, and knew that though he was dearer to the lonely man than any other human creature, Sir James yet possessed very strong views of the duty of kindred.

Geoffrey had fancied Alfreton Towers would go to one of the Major's children, and since Major's arrival, and the dying man's evident admiration of her, he had fancied she would be the chosen heiress; now, as it seemed to Geoffrey, Sir James had left things at a dead lock, and—with probably the kindest intentions—had made the future as difficult as possible to those most closely connected with him.

The servants retreated, the guests filed out with kindly adieux but blank silence regarding the will, since to congratulate or to condole with either Mr. Fairfax or the Major would have seemed a positive slight to the other. At last only three persons remained—the dead man's step-son, his half-brother, and the lawyer.

Geoffrey was the first to speak.

"I assure you, Major Ward," he said, gravely, "I had not an idea of this."

"I am sure you had not," replied the Major; "but it is exactly the sort of thing we might have expected of my brother; he would have liked to make you his heir, but he had some qualms of conscience about leaving out his own flesh and blood, so he made up his mind to give my girl a chance of sharing the property. Of course I know he condemned my second marriage, so it is not likely he would have given a thought

to my younger children, though, goodness knows, they needed a legacy far more than Marjory."

"Sir James was perfectly sane," testified Mr. Bold; "I told him the codicil would cause a good deal of confusion, but he only said he didn't care; he believed you (Mr. Fairfax) would make his niece a good husband, and he meant to do his best to ensure your having a chance of winning her."

"I see now," said the Major, "why you were anxious for my daughter not to be present, Bold."

Bold nodded.

"She will have to be told, of course; but it would have been hard on a young lady to hear such mention of her name in a room full of strangers."

"A good many things want explaining," said Fairfax, gravely; "for instance, Miss Ward and I are allowed three years and a day before we decide whether or not to comply with Sir James's will. During that time what becomes of the property?"

"You enter at once upon the duties of the agency and the salary of three thousand a-year; and the trustees (myself and Dr. Arnold) hold the property in charge until you marry Miss Ward. If the three years and a day pass without your union with this young lady things go on precisely the same, save that if you wed any one else you lose the right of living at Alfreton Towers. Of course you will know long before you have to give up your post whether your son or Miss Ward's will be the ultimate master of the estate."

"It all depends on which marries first," said the Major, irritably.

"Pardon me," said the lawyer, "not exactly; the first marriage might be childless, or the only issue of it be daughters; the marriage which is first blessed with a son is the lucky one. Though, of course, if that son died before his majority the estate would pass to the son of the rival family if nearer in age than his next brother."

"I don't want the Towers," said Fairfax, rather bitterly. "I should advise Miss Ward to choose a husband as soon as possible."

Mr. Bold looked straight into the young man's face and put the question Major Ward did not like to ask.

"You feel quite sure that you and the young lady cannot share the property?"

"I feel quite sure that I shall not insult Marjory by such a suggestion. I have known her barely ten days; why should she sacrifice her whole future in order that I may enjoy a fortune?"

"Are you engaged to anyone else?" asked the Major.

"No; I am utterly and entirely fancy free; but I have romantic notions, and one of them is that when I marry my wife should give me her whole heart even as she has mine. I should despise myself if I married in order to become master of Alfreton Towers. No, Major Ward, that honour is reserved for your grandson."

"I had better go and speak to Marjory," said her father with such manifest reluctance that the two gentlemen he left could hardly forbear to smile.

"It is a thousand pities," said the lawyer to Geoffrey when Major Ward was out of earshot; "you are just suited for a country landowner."

"Now, Bold," said Geoff, contentedly, "you are not to pity me. At the very worst I shall have three thousand a-year for twenty-two years, besides my own thousand, which is settled on me for life; if out of sixty-six thousand I can't save a little I deserve to be a poor man. Besides, the house and grounds are to be kept up out of the estate, so I shall be at very little expense."

"Unless you take a wife!" suggested Mr. Bold.

Geoffrey frowned.

"I don't mind telling you, old friend, that the stinging of my step-father's will is this, I never met a girl I admired more than Marjory Ward; I never saw one who more resembled my ideal; if Sir James had only left us free to please ourselves I do believe in time his cherished wish would have been realized."

"And now!"

"It is utterly impossible. I will never put it in any woman's power to say I married her to secure a fortune."

Upstairs the Major was having rather a bad time of it with Marjory. His daughter received his news in quite a different manner to his expectations. Marjory refused to be pitied or consoled with, she actually smiled.

"Poor Uncle James! I suppose he could not bring himself to leave me quite out in the cold, and so he gave me a chance of marrying his heir. He knew quite well that I should take the onus of the refusal, and so Mr. Fairfax would take everything."

"You talk like a baby," said her father, irritably; "it makes no difference who refuses. Unless you and Geoffrey Fairfax are man and wife within three years the property is locked up in trust, until such time as your oldest son (or Geoffrey's if his is older) comes of age."

Marjory blushed and laughed again; to the girl it was a jest to think of this provision for a grown-up son.

"And if neither of us ever marry?"

"Oh, I don't know, I didn't ask, the case is hard enough as it is. Marjory, I am not a mercenary man, but I had so hoped for a legacy; you have no idea of the struggle I have to make both ends meet, and every year the children will be growing more expensive."

"We must not go out so much," said Marjory; "if we give up hiring a carriage, and only visit the people within a walk, that will save a lot."

"A mere trifling," he said, pettishly; "besides, I can't ask my wife to give up society and bury herself at Riverside; Julia is quite a young woman, she's barely six and thirty."

"If it is for the children you want to retrench she ought not to mind," said the stern young mentor.

"It's deuced hard on her," said the Major, forgetting politeness to his daughter in pity for his wife. "She has to make a smaller income than we had for two when we first married, do for eight now, and it's no easy matter."

Marjory looked her father full in the face.

"I have told you over and over again I will gladly go away if it will make things easier for you or Mrs. Ward."

"You talk folly," said her father angrily; "if you went away to-morrow the trustees of your mother's marriage settlement would stop the allowance for you. You need not think Julia looks on you as a burden, she knows perfectly that you represent one-third of our income."

"Then I don't see what I can do," said Marjory drearily; "if things are so bad it seems to me we ought to live more quietly; but you say your wife wouldn't like that."

"No; I wish to goodness James had left me a legacy. I suppose, Marjory, you and Fairfax couldn't hit it off together! He is a decent enough fellow, and with such an estate as this he would not need to think of your little fortune, but would let you make it over to us."

Marjory looked grave; she was not an ungenerous disposition, but the selfishness of her father's proposal struck her forcibly.

"I am quite sure that I shall never marry Geoffrey Fairfax," she said, firmly; "and if I had ever such a wealthy husband I should not like to give up my own money. It would be enough to make me feel independent, and save my having to ask for every sixpence I wanted. Besides, it was mother's very own, and I don't see why her money should go to your second family."

Major Ward scowled; he did not relish this very plain speaking.

"Oh, keep your wretched thousands if it pleases you," he said, bitterly. "I am sure I don't want them. And let me tell you, Marjory, a man doesn't always care for his wife to have money, it makes her so deuced independent. If your mother had not had an income of her own she would never have foisted a stranger's child on me."

"You used to love Doris as your own child," said Marjory; "of course I know that lately you have been prejudiced against her, and by whom. Mrs. Ward has no right to complain, she makes

Doris work as hard as any nursemaid in return for the food she grudges her."

"Well, the arrangement can't go on," said the Major, who was in a bad temper. "I am not going to keep another man's child any longer."

Marjory was too angry with her father to go down to dinner; everyone at the Towers ascribed her absence to her embarrassment at the thought of meeting Geoffrey Fairfax so soon after hearing her uncle's plans. Geoffrey believed this himself, but he had quite made up his mind to have a few words in private with Marjory before she left the Towers, so knowing she generally took a stroll in the grounds before breakfast he rose early the next morning and managed to way-lay her in a pretty winding shrubbery which led to the rose garden.

But Marjory did not blush or look confused; she put out her hand as confidently as though Sir James had not left such a very confusing will.

"I am so glad to meet you," she said, frankly; "you know we start at ten o'clock to-day, and I wanted to see you alone first."

"And I wanted to tell you I hoped my father's eccentric will would not turn you against me. I assure you I had no hand in it. I am a very lonely man, Marjory. I can't afford to lose my new found cousin."

"I never gave the will a second thought," said Marjory; "but since you have mentioned the subject I believe I understand it better than anyone else. Uncle James knew that I was not likely to fall in with his wishes, and as it was certain I should refuse my part of the compact it was just the same as leaving the property to you outright."

Geoffrey knew she was wrong, but he would not embarrass her by alluding to the part of the will concerning their possible offspring; he only said, cheerfully—

"Well, I am not going to grumble; the dear old man loved me too well for me to reproach him; besides, I never was ambitious, and I shall do very well; only with my father I have lost all home ties, and I should like to think that I still had the friendship you promised me some days ago."

"You have it," she answered gravely; "in fact, I was going to take advantage of that compact of friendship to ask you a favour."

Geoffrey felt delighted; what a sensible girl she was! Why, most young women would have thought it their duty to avoid him like the plague after Sir James' will!

"I will do it with pleasure, only tell me what it is."

"Let us sit down here," said Marjory, "for I am afraid it is rather a long story. First of all I must tell you papa and I nearly quarrelled last night. Oh! not about the will," as Geoffrey looked distressed. "You know I told you about my adopted sister; well, it was in talking of her we disagreed."

"And the favour!" asked Geoffrey; "of course I remember your telling me about Miss West, and how cruelly unjust Mrs. Ward was to her just because the poor girl was at her mercy. It made me think very badly of your step-mother."

"Well, she has done worse than that now; she has persuaded papa he can't afford to keep Doris, and she is to be sent away."

"But the Major can't send a defenceless girl out into the world to shift for herself."

"He means to do it! He actually spoke against his wife, my own angel mother, because she had brought a strange child into his home. But it is all that woman's doings, Mr. Fairfax. In the old days when we were children papa loved Doris quite as much as he loved me."

"And the favour!" repeated Geoffrey, hoping she would not ask him to remonstrate with the Major. He blamed that gentleman pretty heavily in his heart, but he knew that the matter was really no concern of his, and the older man might certainly resent his interference.

"I want you to find Doris's father," said Marjory; "of course, I know it is asking a great deal of you, but then you are so generous. I don't think you will mind, and as you have no profession, and are tolerably rich, the time

and expense would not be such an object to you."

"Marjory," he answered, gently, "I am honoured by your trust, and I promise you it shall not be misplaced. I will do my utmost to find your friend's father; but you know that twenty years are a long time, and he may be dead."

"I think he would have repented on his deathbed," said Miss Ward, severely. "No, something convinces me he is alive."

"Then will you tell me all you have ever heard about him. You see I must have some clue to go on."

"Unfortunately I know so very little. Until we went to live with my father and his new wife a year ago Doris and I both believed we were sisters," and then she gave him the outline of Mrs. West's death, and Mrs. Ward's adoption of Doris.

"Had Mrs. West been long in Hartsleigh?"

"Only a few months. My aunt, Mrs. Meredith, who took care of Doris and me for ten years, used to tell us Mrs. West's story, though she never dropped a word of her being Doris's mother. Mrs. West came a month before her baby was born. She was very young and pretty, and seemed to have plenty of money. My uncle was her doctor, and she told him she had no relations of her own, and that her husband could not join her in Scotland on account of urgent family affairs. Uncle David wrote to Mr. West pretty sharply, and he came at last, only to find his wife dead."

"Your uncle must have had his address if he wrote to him."

"My mother wrote to him later, but always at some West-end library, so the address was no real clue. He (Mr. West) was going to put the baby out to nurse when mother offered to take her for a year or two till she grew out of infancy. Mr. West said he had expectations from a rich aunt who would disinherit him if she heard of his wife and child, as she wanted him to marry a *protégée* of her own."

"And this was—"

"In the autumn of 1872."

"Then we have these facts to go on, that Mr. West was probably married in 1871, that he had then a wealthy maiden aunt, in whose company he was often seen, and no recognised profession."

"My mother wrote down a statement of the facts just before she died, and left it with Uncle David in case Doris ever tried to find her father. My uncle sent it to me when he knew we had been told Doris was not my sister. From this statement Mr. West was evidently a gentleman moving in the best society, and his wife, though a lady, was his social inferior; mother thought she was the child of some old tutor or other family acquaintance; from her remarks she evidently knew all her husband's connections, and was as anxious as himself to hide her existence from them. At first Mr. West used to send presents to Doris, generally a bank note. The last, which was for a hundred pounds (a much larger amount than the others), came in June, 1875; from that day forward nothing has been heard of him."

"Then depend upon it he took some decisive step about that time. You are certain he was not a soldier!"

"Positive; but why?"

"His regiment might have been ordered on foreign service about that time. You see, Marjory, something happened to him just after he sent the last bank note which prevented his sending more money for a little time; knowing what was coming, he made his gift in June larger than usual. Perhaps the habit of writing to Mrs. Ward once dropped he found it difficult to resume it, or else the circumstances of his life were such that he had no money to send. You see he may have offended his aunt and been cut off even without the proverbial shilling; any way, a crisis in his life must have come soon after June, 1875."

"Yes. Do you think you could find him, Mr. Fairfax? Tell him my mother was true to her trust while she lived, and that I would gladly

share all I have with Doris, only my hands are tied."

"I will do my utmost," said Geoffrey, earnestly. "I suppose you have no idea whether Mr. West was Scotch?"

"I think not. His wife was Welsh. Her maiden name was Winifred Johnson. I have thought sometimes Mr. West must have come from one of the border counties like Hereford or Monmouth."

"The pity of it is that both West and Johnson are such common names."

"I know," replied the girl; "but Winifred and Aubrey are uncommon. I don't think that two Aubrey Wests could both have married a Winifred Johnson."

"I shall have to stay here a few days to get business affairs into shape, then I will begin the quest. I shall go to Hartsleigh; it is just possible someone may be left who remembers Mrs. West, and could tell me where she lived before coming there. When I get back from Scotland I shall turn up a 'Landed Gentry' and see what families have West for their paternal name."

"It is very good of you."

"Not at all; we promised to be friends, you know. May I come and see you at Riverside and report progress?"

Marjory hesitated, so he added,—

"Your father has already invited me to visit him, so he will only think I am there in response to his kindness."

"Then please come. When you see Doris I am sure you will not mind the trouble you are taking."

"I do not mind it now."

Dead silence.

"This may be my last chance of seeing you alone," said Geoffrey, presently. "Will you promise me that if you have any more commands for me you will send them? I may be moving about a good deal, but this will be my home, and all letters sent here will be forwarded."

"I promise."

He took her hand and held it clasped in his for perhaps a minute. Then they walked together to the house, Marjory thinking how "nice" it was of him to be so friendly in spite of that absurd will, Geoffrey a little sorrowful, for he had gauged the secret of his own heart, now he knew that he loved Marjory Ward with all the strength of his nature; but his kind old stepfather's well-meant match-making had made it almost impossible for him to tell her so, and quite impossible that she should believe him.

"He was a dear old fellow," said Geoffrey to himself, thinking of Sir James; "but he has made a terrible muddle of things. I know he had the kindest motives; but, oh! I wish he had let well alone."

It was not in Major Ward's nature to be angry with anyone long, much less with his firstborn, who, in spite of all his Julia's influence, would always be his favourite child; so in the long drive to the railway-station he told Marjory he had been too hasty the day before, that he had no thought of being unkind to her, and that though he still felt he could not in justice to his own flock keep Doris West much longer, he would not let her leave Riverside until she had found a congenial home.

"She's a nice little girl," he said, heartily, "and there must be many a childless woman who would be glad of her company. I'll speak to Lady Maxwell and one or two other people, and ask them if they know of a likely home for Doris. If they don't we'll advertise in the *Times*. My wife is not unreasonably. When she knows the girl is really to leave us she will be kind enough to her for the short time that remains."

Marjory sighed.

"I wish I could go away too."

"Aren't you happy at home?" her father asked, a little sadly. "Don't you know, my dear, I would do a great deal to make you so!"

Marjory shook her head.

"I never feel it is my home," she said, simply; "it seems to belong to Mrs. Ward and the children. I am just one too many."

They had a very comfortable journey. The

trains fitted, and so they reached London by five o'clock. The Major decided to sleep in town, and go on to Earlston early the next day.

"Julia will not expect us till to-morrow," he explained to his daughter, "and I don't want to be tired out."

"Shall you tell her about the will?" asked Marjory, with flaming cheeks.

"I shall only tell her that my name was not so much as mentioned, unless she asks who comes in for the *Towers*."

"Which she is sure to do."

"Well, in that case I must tell her the truth; but don't blush so, my dear. There's no disgrace in poor Jim wishing you to marry his son (as he considered Fairfax), and I can't help saying you might go farther and fare worse. I liked what I saw of Geoffrey extremely."

So had Marjory; but she did not think it necessary to say so.

They reached Earlston at twelve, and drove on to Riverside.

Marjory went straight to the schoolroom, where she expected to find Doris teaching the elder children; but the room was empty. Then she made her way to the nursery. The nurse was the only one of Mrs. Ward's servants who treated poor little Miss West as a young lady, not as a drudge at their mistress's beck and call. In consequence nurse was a special favourite with the eldest daughter of the house.

"Why, Miss Marjory, is it you? Mrs. Ward did not tell me you were coming home!"

"I expect she forgot it, nurse. Where's Doris? Why is the schoolroom empty?"

"The children are out, Miss Marjory, with their new governess."

"Has Mrs. Ward really got a governess at last? I am glad, for Doris was nearly worked to death."

Nurse looked uncomfortable.

"Miss Marjory, dear," she said, gently, "there's been changes here. I'm sure I never dreamed you didn't know or I'd have sent you a bit of a letter myself."

"Changin'!" almost gasped Marjory. "What do you mean, nurse? Where is Doris? Mrs. Ward can't have sent her away!"

Nurse looked more troubled even than before.

"No doubt the mistress'll tell you the rights of it better than I can do, Miss Marjory. She went to Brighton two days after you went away, and took Miss West with her. Mrs. Ward came home by the last train alone. She came up here, Miss Marjory, almost white with rage, and ordered me to pack every scrap of Miss West's things, as she'd never come back. The next morning, while I was out with the children, Miss Doris came back in a station fly and a gentleman with her. The mistress saw them alone. I can't tell you, Miss Marjory, what happened; but very soon they drove off again, and took the luggage with them."

Pale and anxious, yet quite calm and dry-eyed, Marjory turned to the door.

"No nurse," she said, gently, in reply to a question from the woman. "Of course it is not your fault. You could not help it; but I am going straight to Mrs. Ward to ask her what she has done with my sister."

(To be continued.)

An interesting Nelson relic was sold in London recently. It was a mahogany cabin washstand always used by Nelson on board ship. It was given by him to James Brown, purser, Royal Navy, who was his private secretary, and has been often exhibited; it was knocked down for twenty guineas.

At the opening of the People's Palace Exhibition, on June 6th, H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, on behalf of the Princess, accepted a casket containing specimens of Maypole Soap, a new invention, which washes and dyes any colour or shade without soiling the hands. Maypole Soap is manufactured in the East-end of London, and well deserves this royal recognition, as it is responsible for the employment of a small army of workpeople.

VIVIEN'S AWAKENING.

—20—

CHAPTER VII.—(continued).

In vain Bertram Valentine attempted to frame excuses to enable him to break away from Gertrude and his sisters after the luncheon hour, for he knew just how anxiously Vivien was awaiting his coming.

"You would not be so unkind!" cried Gertrude, imploringly. "Just think! you have been away a whole month; and now, on the first evening of your return, you do not care to remain in my society."

She looked away from him, and he saw her crimson lips tremble, and the dark eyes raised to his own were heavy with unshed tears.

It was not in Bertram Valentine's nature to refuse the request of such a beautiful pleader, and as he looked down upon her, so queenly in her dark, perfect loveliness, he asked himself which of these two beautiful girls, who were each so lovely in her own way, he cared for most—and both loved him so well.

"Have you forgotten," she went on coquettishly, "that we are to go to the Grand Concert to-morrow evening? If you have forgotten it, that would mean that you have not been thinking of me."

"You have not been out of my mind a single moment, my darling," he answered, carelessly; but his eyes avoided hers, and a guilty flush stole into his face.

A bitter sob trembled on her lips, for she was thinking of golden-haired Vivien, and how cleverly he was deceiving both of them.

Yet Gertrude carried her point for that evening, at least, her handsome lover did not leave her side.

And the next day and evening fate was against him. He could find no time to visit the cottage.

"A few hours more or less will not matter. I cannot see Vivien before to-morrow," he thought, resigning himself with a careless smile to Gertrude's society.

Yet during the course of the afternoon he did manage to write a line to Vivien, "not to sit up and wait for him, as he had some very important business to transact with his father, which might occupy every moment of his time for a day or so, and that his darling little bride must not be lonely, for the time would soon pass, and he would come to her at the earliest possible moment."

He knew he must spend his first evening home with Gertrude, and the next he was booked for the concert.

Bertram Valentine never saw Gertrude Frost so brilliant and lovely as she was that night. She exerted herself to please and attract him as she had never done in all her life before.

By a strong effort of her indomitable will she swept away all unpleasant thoughts. All her wit, genius, her talent were called into requisition to make the evening as enjoyable that he would, in her society, forget the golden-haired young girl so eagerly awaiting his coming.

The next evening, in the midst of the crash of the music, the glow of the sea of light from the chandeliers, the soft notes of the tender love strain the songstress in a bower of roses was rendering to an entranced audience, would Gertrude Frost start guiltily, and turn pale as she thought, with a shudder, of the event which might be transpiring at that very instant at the cottage.

But she had sworn to separate them, come what would, let the cost be what it might; and no pang of remorse swept through her proud, cold heart as she thought of Vivien's pain.

If this golden-haired Vivien, with her soft, appealing blue eyes, was only out of her way, Bertram would be all her own again.

Aaron Budd had said to her at parting—

"I will enter the cottage as soon as the shades of night have gathered, and when you hear the clocks in the belfries chime the hour of ten you may be sure that my work is done. The girl will never cross your path again."

CHAPTER VIII.

We must now return to Vivien, whom we left standing, pale with terror, before the mysterious closet.

As the panel door slid noiselessly back Vivien saw a black, yawning aperture stretched out before her, and where the rays of light penetrated upon the dusty floor her terrified gaze encountered crimson stains, like pools of blood.

It was then that the shrieks of mortal fear echoed loudly through the cottage at the dead hour of the night.

Vivien would have fallen headlong into the black abyss had not a strong hand thrust her back from the closet, and the same hand grasped the shaded night-lamp from her fingers, and Mary, with a face pale as death, stood before her.

"You must not go in there!" she said, drawing the door swiftly to, its spring lock closing with an audible click. "Come away; oh, for Heaven's sake, come away!" urged Mary. "Remember, I warned you not to enter this room, or go near that door, but curiosity got the best of you, and might have led you to what might have been worse than death. Bertram Valentine was certainly mad—stark mad—when he sent you to this house—all places in the world."

"Why, one would almost fancy the closet contained a skeleton," said Vivien, turning away with a shudder. Then all the fearlessness of her brave young nature asserted itself, and she added: "I am sure it contains nothing but dust, emptiness, and darkness. Just as soon as Bertram comes, I shall insist upon inspecting it with him."

She saw a curious smile flit over Mary's face. She did not know what it meant then, but there came a day not far distant when she understood it all.

Wearied out with her long hours of watching Vivien returned to her room again, and threw herself down upon her pretty white lace-draped bed; and this time, forgetful of the cruel neglect her young husband had shown her, sleep waked down those gold-fringed eyelids, but her dreams were troubled.

She thought she was back on the old farm again, stealing softly out of the house, away from her aunt's watchful eyes, stealing out to meet her handsome young lover.

Bertram had clasped her in his arms, covering her blushing face with passionate kisses, when suddenly a beautiful young girl with dark, flashing eyes and a haughty, scornful face, crying out,—

"He is mine! You shall not take him from me! I will kill you first with these white hands of mine!"

Vivien had knelt at her feet with a piteous cry:

"Do not take him from me! I have no one but Bertram to love in all the world! If you take him from me I shall die!"

And the bitter anguish of the cry awoke her.

She sat straight up in bed; the bright morning-munshine was falling full upon her face, filling the pretty pink-and-white room with its golden gleams.

"How silly I am to be troubled by a dream!" she cried out, tossing the tumbled golden curls back from her flushed, dimpled face.

The pearl-and-gold clock on the bracket pointed to eight. Still no signs of Bertram.

"Oh! why doesn't he come?" sobbed Vivien, wringing her hands. "Was ever bride treated like this?" she murmured, her lips trembling as she proceeded to arrange her toilet; but the pretty, white muslin dress, with its dainty ruffles, and the pale blue satin sash, knotted about her slender waist, had lost its charm for her.

Yet she never thought of losing faith in her young husband; she had been blind to his faults; she had worshipped him so with all the strength of her adoring love.

Only those who have not learned by bitter experience ever imagine that love can grow cold and a lover prove false. Unsuspecting hearts, in the first sweet flush of love's young dream, never think of such a probability.

So it was with Vivien. There was no excuse

she did not make to appease her heart for his cruel neglect.

Mary was quite surprised at the beautiful girlish vision that dawned upon her a few moments later from the doorway of the pretty morning-room where she had arranged a tempting breakfast for her.

"There wouldn't be the least possible use in attempting to eat anything until Bertram comes," declared Vivien, "for I couldn't do it. I'll sit down by the window and watch for him. He must be here very soon now."

The subject of the previous night's adventure was tacitly avoided by both of them.

The second day at the cottage passed much like the first to the forsaken little bride. All day long poor little Vivien sat at the window peering down the street, assuring herself over and over again that Bertram would soon come now.

She looked so utterly desolate and forlorn Mary pitied her from the bottom of her heart.

"How she loves that handsome, reckless fellow!" thought Mary, compassionately. "And as for Bertram Valentine, he will care for her until he sees some other face that strikes his fickle fancy; for he is no sooner out of one love scrape than he is head over heels into another."

There was no one to talk to but Mary, and Vivien was glad to beguile the slow, dragging hours by telling her of the romantic meeting with her dark-eyed lover, and of their still more romantic marriage and elopement, and the silly warning in the dream-book.

But the enthusiasm was not reflected upon Mary's darkening face, as she listened to the artless tale; and Vivien opened her lovely blue eyes, surprised, wondering why Mary looked so grave over her pretty love story.

Just at that moment they were startled by the quick, jerky ring of the door-bell, and before Mary could interfere, Vivien, with flushed cheeks and eyes glowing like stars, had sprung down the hall and opened the door herself.

The disappointment in store was almost too much for her.

Instead of handsome Bertram Valentine standing on the threshold with smiling face and outstretched arms as she had expected, it was only a messenger with Bertram's short note for her. She tore it open with trembling fingers, and ran her eyes over the contents, which were as follows,—

"DEAR LITTLE VIVIEN,—

"I cannot come to you to-night, as I had expected; an important engagement prevents, which cannot be postponed on any account. Bear patiently with me a little longer, my darling."

"Yours hurriedly,

"BERTRAM."

The messenger never forgot the dumb misery in the lovely blue eyes drowned in tears she had vainly endeavoured to keep back.

A sudden brilliant idea seemed to occur to her, and the clouds cleared, as if by magic, from her sweet flower-like face.

"If Bertram cannot come to me, why should I not go to him?" she thought, eagerly. But, ah! there was one terrible drawback, she did not even know his address; but perhaps the messenger would know!

But he did not; the gentleman had sent the note from the office.

"Oh, dear, I wanted to see him so much," sobbed Vivien, sinking down on a chair.

"I know where you could see him this evening, if you cared so very much," replied the boy, pitying her keen distress. "Just after he left our office I saw him go and purchase tickets for the grand concert at the Albert Hall to-night. If you were to go there you would see him."

Poor Vivien's face turned from pink to white as she listened.

"There must be some mistake," she faltered. "Bertram would not remain away from me to go to a concert. I am sure he must have bought those tickets for somebody else."

"Go and see, and be convinced for yourself," suggested the boy, as he touched his cap and bowed himself respectfully out of her presence.

For an hour or more the miserable little bride sat there staring dumbly at the note she held in her white, trembling fingers.

"Yes, I will go and see for myself," she sobbed, clasping her hands over her throbbing heart; "but I am sure I will find it false. Bertram would never go to a concert and leave me all alone by myself, so bitterly lonely. I will not believe it."

The shades of night were again falling around her; and she told herself if she were to go there was little time to be lost, and hurrying to her room she threw a long dark cloak over her white dress, and donning a modest, dark little hat with a scarlet wing on one side, she tucked her pretty golden curls beneath a veil, and stole quietly out of the cottage.

Vivien had scarcely proceeded a dozen steps ere she felt completely turned about. The dazzling lights and the confusing throng of people upon the streets bewildered her, yet she hurried along with the crowd, pausing, however, at every turn to inquire the way.

"You seem to be a stranger to London," said a handsome, foppish young dandy, stepping up to her and lifting his hat with an elaborate bow. "If I can be of any assistance to you, miss, pray command me. I heard you inquiring the way to the Albert Hall. I am going in that direction myself, and if you will permit me, I will gladly show you the way."

Too much cannot be said of the pitiful sorrows resulting from these street acquaintances. This story must point its own moral, and it is to be hoped, prove a warning in season to all young girls who are too guileless to understand the true motive that prompts unprincipled men to address pretty young girls in the streets.

Poor little Vivien was unused to the ways of the world. There was no one to warn her of the danger that lurked in the polite young stranger's smile; and she looked up with childish simplicity and answered,—

"You are quite right, sir; I am a stranger. I have never been in a large city before, and if you will be so kind as to show me the way I shall be ever so much obliged."

"Don't mention it," replied the exquisite young dandy, with a smile. "I shall only be too pleased to accompany you. But aren't you going to remove your veil? You attract too much attention by covering your face in the streets at night. Besides, I really must confess I am anxious to see if your face corresponds with your voice, it is so sweet."

At that moment they were walking in the shadow of some irregular buildings, and Vivien, believing implicitly that what he said must be true, quietly removed her veil.

"Heavens! what a regular little beauty!" exclaimed her companion in astonishment. "By Jove! I'm the luckiest fellow alive to have fallen in with such a little jewel!" he cried, as the flickering light of a gas-lamp fell full upon Vivien's dimpled, flower-like face, framed in its sheen of golden hair. "I must steal a kiss here and now, pretty one!" he cried, rapturously, bending dangerously near her; "there is no one looking."

"Stand back! Don't dare to touch me!" cried Vivien, springing past him with a cry of terror.

A mocking laugh answered her.

"Do you think I am going to lose such an exquisite little fairy in this way?" he cried, springing after her.

The lonely side street they were traversing seemed wholly deserted, save by the flying forms of Vivien and her desperate pursuer.

Deadly fear seemed to lend wings to her flying feet.

"Bertram—Bertram!" she gasped, "save me, save me!" but only the night winds answered that frantic appeal.

CHAPTER IX.

"WHAT a little vixen you are!" cried the fellow. "Indeed, I shall have to claim two kisses for the chaise you have given me."

He was just about to suit the action to the word, when a young man who had been standing on the curb-stone near them an indignant

spectator of the scene, quickly interposed by grasping the obnoxious offender by the coat-collar and hurling him violently backward.

"You are free to go on your way, miss," he said, turning to Vivien, and lifting his hat politely; "I will see that you are not followed by this rascal."

The handsome young stranger who had rendered Vivien such timely assistance could not see her face, for, almost fainting with mortification, she had quickly drawn her veil down over it, while she shrunk still further into the shadow.

As the light of the gas-lamp had fallen full upon the face of her rescuer she had recognised him instantly. He was Cuthbert Leigh, the young college chum Bertram had brought to witness their romantic marriage in the glen.

Vivien dared not utter one word of thanks lest her voice might betray her identity to Bertram's friend. But gathering her cloak closer about her trembling form she hurried rapidly away.

Fate, as if repentant for the misery already caused her, was beginning to show much kindness. Just ahead of her she saw the lights of the Albert Hall.

No one noticed the slight dark figure that edged her way in with the bustling crowd.

"I should like a seat where I shall be able to see all over the house," faltered Vivien.

"She's country," thought the ticket-seller, but he only smiled and answered,—

"Most people want seats where they can get the best view of the stage."

A few moments later she was seated in the auditorium.

Vivien never once thought about the concert, so intent was she in scanning eagerly the sea of faces around her.

The glittering lights, the crash of music, and the vast throng bewildered poor little Vivien not a little.

"How am I ever to distinguish one face from among so many," she thought, despairingly, to herself; "it is like picking out one daisy upon a hill-side among countless thousands."

Eagerly and patiently Vivien's bright blue eyes roamed over the vast audience, scanning them one by one.

Suddenly the fair young face grew as white as a snow-drop; her heart beat and her whole frame trembled.

Yes, Bertram was there in a box on the first tier, looking handsomer than ever, his dark head and face shining from the crimson velvet hangings like a clear-cut cameo.

Bertram Valentine was one of the few men whom evening-dress suited exactly. None in that vast audience looked so handsome or kingly. The prismatic gleam of his fine diamond studs, the blaze from the ring he wore upon his white aristocratic hand, and the crimson rosebuds in the lapel of his coat, all seemed to add to his grand beauty.

But he was not alone; a magnificently dressed young girl sat beside him—a young girl with a proud face and large dark eyes that spoke volumes of love as they were raised to Bertram's face.

The lights and the music seemed to crash strangely around poor little Vivien, the miserable, forsaken little bride, who had never realised before that there was such a cruel thing in the world as deceit.

Poor little Vivien sat watching the young girl intently, with her very soul in her eyes. She was so wretchedly, bitterly jealous of every look Bertram bent upon her—the same elegantly attired young girl who had come to the station with Bertram's father to meet him—the face of the young girl who had come between her young husband and herself in the dream that had troubled her so, crying out "that it would be war to the knife between them to the bitter end."

It was all that Vivien could do to restrain herself from rising in her seat, heedless of all the wondering people around her, and crying out,—

"Oh, Bertram! my love! my love! See, I am here—Vivien, your poor, neglected little bride. Leave that cold, proud beauty; your place is by my side, not hers. Oh, my love, my husband, come to me, or my poor tortured heart

will surely break! She cannot love you as I do!"

Gertrude Frost turned slightly in her seat, and for one brief instant the flashing dark eyes and the piteous blue ones met, and Vivien almost fancied that the crimson lips curled scornfully and were saying, "He is mine!"

Anyone must have been blind that did not notice the adoring, passionate love that softened the beautiful, haughty face as Bertram Valentine talked to her.

Vivien noticed it with a dull, cold chill of horror that seemed to almost take her breath away.

"I cannot understand why Bertram ever cared for me—a poor, plain little country girl—after knowing a beautiful girl like that," she thought bitterly, the wonder growing stronger every moment. "Why did he marry me instead of the brilliant young girl to whom he is so attentive?" she asked herself over and over again.

She heard the applause of the audience as song after song was trillingly rendered by the eminent artists, but Vivien scarcely heeded it. She sat blindly staring at the box where her young husband sat—all unconscious of her near presence—all devotion to the wilful beauty by his side.

Vivien watched them with an agony too pitiful to be described by words. Only those who have been tried by the bitter, fierce-consuming jealousy of love's fire could ever understand what the neglected little bride suffered.

Next to Vivien sat a gentleman and his wife, whose amusement seemed to consist in pointing out to each other different people in the audience in a gossiping sort of way, and it was not long before their attention was drawn toward Bertram and his beautiful companion.

"Who is that young girl?" asked the wife; "she seems to be attracting universal attention. It must be gratifying to her escort to know half of the opera-glasses in the house are resting upon her as though she were a magnet."

"Why, she is considered the wealthiest as well as the most beautiful girl in London," remarked her husband, following her gaze.

"Who is she?" repeated the wife. "I can see for myself how handsome she is, but I want to know who she is."

"Her name is Gertrude Frost. She is old Captain Frost's daughter. She's home on a vacation from boarding-school, and visiting her escort's sisters."

"And who is the handsome young man with her?" questioned the wife, with unpeased curiosity.

And Vivien scarcely breathed as she heard the answer,—

"Oh, everybody knows him; he is Sir Gilbert Valentine's son, a good-hearted fellow enough, but as reckless as he is handsome. His one great failing is a constitutional liking for pretty faces. He cannot withstand a woman's smile, and he is scarcely off with the old love before he is on with the new."

"He seems greatly in love with his pretty companion, judging from his actions," remarked the lady, slowly.

"Oh, yes," laughed her husband, lightly: "you see, my dear, this one is different from his other loves. It is a well-known fact that he is soon to marry Miss Frost; I saw the notice of their approaching marriage in this morning's paper. It will be quite a social event."

A little startled, half-sobbing cry beside him arrested the sentence on his lips. He turned quickly toward the little white-faced creature seated on the other side of him.

She was staring straight at the stage now, and the gentleman mentally concluded it was something she saw there that agitated her; so he turned back to his wife again, and they did not resume the topic of their former conversation.

His words had given Vivien one keen, sudden, awful shock. For one brief moment her heart seemed to cease beating and stand still; the next instant she could have laughed aloud at the absurd idea. Bertram—her Bertram—soon to marry the haughty beauty beside him! What nonsense! Why, she herself was his wife.

It was almost more than she could do to resist

the temptation of turning around and saying to them—

"The paper did not speak the truth; Bertram could not marry her. He could marry no one, for I am his wife. How dare they speak of him as a man who could marry!"

Vivien fairly trembled with indignation and the intensity of her longing to tell these gossiping people the truth.

And even as she sat there in the crowded hall she was thinking of her strange romantic midnight marriage in the glen, down by the edge of the shadowy lake.

She thought of the strange, wiry little minister who had performed the ceremony in such a peculiar voice.

How white Cuthbert Leigh, Bertram's friend, had looked in the bright moonlight, and how pale and nervous even Bertram himself had appeared, and how relieved he seemed when the whole affair was over.

And now how different was her life from the rosy future she had mapped out for herself.

Here she was, all alone, a forsaken little bride, watching the young husband who had only a few short hours ago written her that he could not come to her that evening, as an "important engagement" detained him.

And now, oh, pitiful discovery! she had found out what that important engagement was—to take a young girl to the musical festival whom gossiping strangers openly and boldly declared that he was soon to marry.

The concert was at its height; yet the poor little tortured soul, the bitterly jealous little bride, could not endure the maddening sight one instant longer. She arose, and drawing her dark cloak closely about her left the hall.

The lights and the music seemed to stifle her, and every time her handsome young husband looked down upon the beautiful girl beside him with that fascinating, winning smile on his lips, such as they had worn when he had wooed and won her in her simple country home, the sight seemed to drive her mad.

"I will wait for him outside," she murmured, drawing back into the shadow of one of the tall marble pillars. "I will confront him with this rumour, and he shall contradict it before all these people who are speaking so falsely of him—that cruel report that was printed in the papers. I will wait for him until the concert is over; then I will fly to him and clasp my arms around his neck, crying out: 'Oh, my love, my love, you must leave her and come with me. I am here—Vivien—your wife! You must choose between us here and now!'"

CHAPTER X.

GERTRUDE FROST leaned carelessly back among the crimson velvet curtains of the opera-box, the cynosure of all eyes, while Bertram Valentine listened to the opera with strange intonateness.

It was the old, old story, told in the pathetic magic witchery of song, so often repeated in real life, of a handsome, aristocratic young student who had on the spur of the moment married a pretty young country maiden of lowly birth, and the sudden awakening to the young husband after the glamour of love had worn off, of how pitifully unsuited they were to each other.

Bertram Valentine listened with a guilty thrill at his heart. Somehow he could not shake off the feeling that was stealing over him, that his alliance with Vivien might have just such an unpleasant ending—poor little Vivien, who trusted so implicitly that she was his wife. And at that moment a bitter regret seized him, and he almost cursed himself for not taking Leigh's advice and leaving the little country wild flower before he had taught her the cruel lesson of love.

"What cannot be cured must be endured," he thought, twitching nervously at his moustache as he turned suddenly away from the stage; and perhaps, after all, Vivien might not take it so hard when he owned up to her his duplicity, and that the marriage was only a farce—so much, alas! has been forgiven in this world all for love's sake.

Gertrude Frost's keen dark eyes, in roaming

over the vast assemblage, had not failed to note the lonely little dark-robed figure, with the lovely death-white face and great childlike blue eyes staring up so pitifully into her own, and she recognised her instantly.

She saw Vivien as she arose abruptly and left the building, and glancing carelessly into a large mirror opposite which reflected the main corridor without, as well as the interior, Gertrude saw the slight, dark figure draw timidly back into the dark, hazy shadow of a marble pillar.

"She is waiting there to make a grand scene when we come out," was Gertrude's mental comment. "I must prevent it at any cost;" and when the concert was over she insisted upon avoiding the crush by making their exit from another entrance, and in this manner she ingeniously eluded Vivien.

In vain Vivien watched for them.

"Oh, I have missed him!" Vivien sobbed out in alarm, as the last person passed out and the porter closed the heavy doors after him.

A moment later she was walking in the dull, cold street again. The gas had been turned out, and the vast building that had been, but a moment since the scene of such brilliancy and mirth, loomed up grim, dark and solemn as a tomb against the night sky.

Vivien made her way quickly back to the cottage again. Ah! how dreary and lonely it looked with the moonlight falling upon it.

As Vivien opened the gate one of the upper windows was dashed violently open, and in the clear bright moonlight a beautiful girlish face flashed out like a meteor—a face distorted with terror, and from its white lips rang out a piteous startled cry, ending in a stifled moan which was suddenly stilled, and the vision disappeared as the window was clashed instantaneously down again.

For a moment Vivien stood still, dumbfounded with surprise.

"Am I dreaming, or is there someone else in the house besides Mary and me?" she asked herself, with a strange chill of fear creeping over her. "What can this terrible mystery mean? If I were silly enough to believe in ghosts I should imagine I had just seen one," thought Vivien, nervously pulling the bell.

It was quite five minutes before Mary appeared at the door.

"Law sakes!" she exclaimed, starting back in surprise; "I thought you was in your bed and asleep long hours ago."

"Please don't tell Bertram that I was out to-night when he comes," said Vivien, throwing off her cloak and following Mary down the hall.

"He shall never know it from me," returned the girl, with a significant toss of her head.

"Who was that I saw up at the window a moment since as I came in?" asked Vivien, suddenly. "Who is she, and what does she want here?"

The light Mary carried trembled so she was obliged to set it down, but her stolid face did not show the slightest embarrassment as she answered slowly.

"It was me you saw at the window; I was closing the blinds for the night."

"You!" exclaimed Vivien, in utter astonishment. "Why, the face I saw was young and beautiful, and I thought I heard a startled cry for help."

Then Mary Smith turned and faced her, looking Vivien keenly in the eye.

"I have always heard of the romantic silly notions young girls often get into their brains, but I had never heard anything quite so foolish as that," she replied, sharply. "There was no one in the house but myself," she added in conclusion; "I slammed the window down on my fingers; I might have uttered a sharp cry at that moment with the pain of it. I suppose that is what you heard."

"The lights and the music and all I have seen must have dazzled my eyes and bewitched me, to 'imagine plain, homely Mary looking so beautiful,' she told herself, and the very oddness of the quaint idea made Vivien smile as she turned and wended her way slowly to her room.

A second letter had come for Vivien while she was talking with her first.

An avenging fate seems to

"I will not give it to her," muttered the girl, watching Vivien's retreating form as she passed rapidly up the stairs. "If Bertram Valentine comes to-night I will see him first myself."

As Vivien sped quickly homeward from the Albert Hall had she turned and looked backward she would have seen the dark figure of a man dodging her footstep.

He saw Vivien pause at the gate, and he dodged hastily behind an adjacent tree just in time to avoid beholding the strange scene enacted at the window.

He saw Vivien enter the cottage, and then he emerged from his place of concealment.

He stopped short in front of the door, and taking a gold pencil and a memorandum book from his pocket leisurely jotted down the number.

"Ha, ha! I have tracked you to your nest, my pretty, fluttering bird!" he cried, with an exultant, sardonic smile curving his moustached lips. "And I shall never rest night or day until I have had revenge for the chase you have given me to-night, or my name is not James Walker," he muttered.

Then, replacing the memorandum in his pocket and twirling the ebony cane he carried in his slim white fingers, with a backward glance at the cottage, the scheming villain strode rapidly down the avenue.

At the corner of the street he came face to face with Bertram Valentine, who was hurrying rapidly in the direction from which he had just come.

Both young men nodded slightly as their eyes met, and they passed on. A sudden impulse, which James Walker could not account for, prompted him to wheel suddenly about and follow Valentine.

"By Jove! I have I unearthed a pretty little hidden secret!" he ejaculated in amazement, as he saw Valentine stop before the cottage, take a latch-key from his pocket, and glancing nervously about him, hastily open the door, closing it noiselessly after him. "Whew!" muttered Walker, his brows meeting in a vindictive scowl, "Valentine is well acquainted there, it seems. It is strange how we two cross each other in every love affair. Is it not enough that he has found more favour in the eyes of every beauty that I have sought to win, and capped the climax when fair Gertrude Frost threw me over for him? And now, curse the luck! he seems to have got the better of me in this new escapade. But I will be even with you this time, my fine Valentine," he muttered, with luridly flashing eyes.

Walker turned on his heel as he spoke and walked rapidly up the avenue again, hailing a passing cab as he reached the corner, and gave directions to drive to one of the most aristocratic, quarters of London.

Meanwhile Valentine, satisfying himself that he was unobserved, entered the cottage and was hurrying swiftly through the dimly-lighted hall when he was suddenly confronted by Mary Smith.

"Hush!" she cried, holding up her finger warningly; "you must not go in there," she whispered, pointing in Vivien's direction. "Hush! I don't let her hear you; she must not know that you are here."

"Have you gone suddenly mad, woman?" cried Valentine, angrily. "What do you mean by this? How dare you dictate to me? You are overstepping the bounds of your duty here."

"I did not give her your last letter," replied Mary, stolidly ignoring his remark.

A dark, angry light leaped up instantly into his eyes, whose flashing brilliancy outshone the gleaming diamond studs he wore upon his immaculate shirt-bosom.

"What do you mean by withholding it?" he demanded, fiercely. "You take advantage of the knowledge you hold. You are to obey me to the letter. Mark my words well; I am not the man to take advantage of by any means."

"I will tell you why I kept it back," whispered the girl, shrilly. "I wanted to have a talk with you first. An avenging fate seems to

FACETIE.

MARY: "Am so glad you had the doctor. Did he believe you?" Dart: "Yes—of £2 2s."

"DR. VIRE is a thorough aristocrat, isn't he?" "Yes; he has such a well-bred way of not listening when you say anything to him."

MISS FLORA (in a pair of stupendous sleeves): "How do I look, Ned?" Ned (rapturously): "You're simply unapproachable."

JIMSON: "Er—I want some sort of a present for a young lady." Jeweller: "Sweetheart or sister?" Jimson: "Er—why—she hasn't said which she will be yet."

BINKS: "Do you suppose a man with a family can live on five shillings a day and be a Christian?" Binks: "Of course. He can't afford to be anything else."

HE: "What do you think of your engagement ring?" She: "You dear, sweet old boy, it's the handsomest I ever had—I mean, I like it ever so much."

CARRIE: "Why was it, I wonder, my poor husband never said anything to me about remarrying?" Anna: "Probably you are not the person he wanted to warn."

CLARA: "So you're engaged at last!" Maude (rather elderly): "Why, how did you know I had accepted him?" Clara: "I heard he had proposed, and that was enough."

"WHAT a lucky man Jones is!" exclaimed Beadle. "He is an A.B., A.M., and LL.D., and I see by this card that he is now an R.S.V.P. He's a lucky dog!"

SHE: "Marry John Jonesmith! If there wasn't another man in the world I wouldn't have him." Uncle George: "Considering the opportunities that would give him for selection I think you're right."

"WHAT a beautiful new gown Jane has on. Did she bring it from abroad?" "No; it's her last season's dress. The dressmaker turned it inside out, and now she says she brought it from the other side."

RAGGED ROBERT (at the door): "Maddam, may I trouble you for a bit of bread?" Lady of the House (threateningly): "I'll call the dog if—" Ragged Robert (with dignity): "Thank ye, but I never eat dogs."

MARY: "Just imagine, Alice! I have received two proposals of marriage." Alice: "Which have you rejected?" May: "Rejected! Neither of them. One I accepted, and the other I put in reserve."

AUNT: "I want to do something to please you on your birthday, Charlie; but I first want to ask your teacher how you behave in school." Charlie: "If you really wish to please me, auntie, don't ask him."

"WHAT has become of your old beau, cook? I haven't seen him around much lately." "No, mum. Martin don't come around much now; he's married." "Oh, oh; he's married, eh? Whom to?" "Me, mum."

GROCER: "Willie, I am glad to see that you are doing the errands quicker. Where were you going when I saw you flying down the street an hour ago?" Willie (the errand boy): "Me, sir! Oh, I was going home to dinner then."

"My dear," he said to his lady-love, "I've been busy all day—not manual labour, you know, but brain work, which is the hardest of all." "Yes, indeed, I know it must be for you." And there was a tender look of sympathy in her eyes which affected him deeply.

"WHAT a grasping fellow you are, Hawkins! You've bothered me about this bill fifty times in ten days!" "You wrong me, Jarley. I'm not grasping. I've bothered you about the bill, I admit; but I haven't been able to grasp anything yet."

MR. BROWN: "I see raising flowers for the manufacture of perfumery has become a new industry in Florida." Mr. Otto de Rose (a perfumery manufacturer): "Flowers?" "Yes." "For the manufacture of perfumery?" "Yes." "Well, wonders will never cease."

FATHER: "You're just the man I've been looking for to marry my daughter, if you have money. The fact is, I have got to put some capital into my business during the next year." Sailor: "U'm! I don't know that I could let you have any, sir." "I don't want your money. All I want you to do is to marry her."

"I DON'T see how you got your daughter to give up bloomers." "I told her they were not becoming." "And did she believe it?" "Not when I told her, but afterwards I got her dearest girl friend to tell her that she looked too lovely for anything in them." "And then?" "Why, then she naturally believed me."

"COME and take supper with me," said A— to B—. "Can't, old man. I'm just married, and my wife expects me home to coffee," was the doleful answer. "What, you drink coffee? Why, I thought you drank tea at night." "Oh, my wife cooks it so that no one can tell the difference."

RECENTLY two friends were riding along a country road, when they met a boy who was carrying a can of milk which he had not long since obtained from the cows. "Hey, lad," said one of the friends to the boy, "can you spare me a pennyworth of that milk?" "No, master, there is no water in it yet," was the boy's answer.

THE wealthy uncle was talking over the prospects of his nephew with the lad's mother. "How is he doing in his studies?" "Very well. He is very accomplished. He shows great talent for music, and his manner is so haughty. His music teacher thinks he will become a conductor." "Ah, indeed! Orchestra or tramcar?"

AN insurance agent applied to a woman to induce her to get her husband's life insured. "Will I be sure to get the money if he dies?" "Certainly, madam." "But will you give me any assurance that he will die?" "No, madam, we cannot do that." "Well, then, what good will it be to me to get his life insured if he don't die? I knew there was some catch about this insurance business."

MR. REYNOLDS is a bright and well-preserved old gentleman, but to his little granddaughter Mabel he seems very old indeed. She had been sitting on his knee, and looking at him seriously for a long time one day, when she asked suddenly: "Grandpa, were you in the Ark?" "Why, no, my dear!" gasped her astonished grandparent. Mabel's eyes grew large and round with astonishment. "Then, grandpa," she asked, "why weren't you drowned?" Bewilderment of grandparent.

AN old woman whose husband was not very well sent for the doctor, who came and saw the old man. When he was departing he said to the old wife,—"I will send him some medicine which must be taken in a recumbent position." After he had gone the old woman sat down greatly puzzled. "A recumbent position—a recumbent position!" she kept repeating. "I haven't got one." At last she thought, "I will go and see if Nurse Lown has got one to lend me." Accordingly she went and said to the nurse,—"Have you a recumbent position to lend me to take some medicine in?" The nurse, who was equally as ignorant as the old woman, replied,—"I had one, but to tell you the truth, I have lost it."

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SOCIETY.

PRESENTS for Princess Maud are now being prepared with the greatest activity. The Royal Warrant-holders have already subscribed a large sum towards a gift for her Royal Highness.

THE German Emperor and Empress will be represented by Prince and Princess Henry of Prussia at Princess Maud of Wales's wedding, and the Empress Frederick will be represented by Prince and Princess Frederick Charles of Hesse.

THE Queen has decided that a cairn shall be erected in the grounds of Balmoral to the memory of Prince Henry of Battenberg. This true Highland custom was inaugurated on the death of the Prince Consort.

THE Princess of Wales has invited Prince and Princess Arlert of Anhalt to attend the wedding of Princess Maud. They will spend a few weeks with Princess Arlert's father and mother, Prince and Princess Christian, at Cumberland Lodge.

THE Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse are coming to England for the Royal wedding, but the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Roumania will spend the summer at their country seat near Bucharest, as the King and Queen are going to Germany early in July for two months.

THE King of Denmark is to stay at Marlborough House while he is in London, and will pay a visit to the Queen at Windsor Castle. The King will be attended in England by one of the Queen's lords in waiting and by one of the Prince of Wales's equerries, probably Major-General Arthur Ellis, who was in attendance on him three years ago, when he came over (with Queen Louise) for the wedding of the Duke and Duchess of York.

THE Queen's favourite English fruit is the strawberry, and in some shape or form it is generally placed on the Royal tables. Her Majesty had fresh strawberries when at Nice, and again on the return of the Court to Windsor; but these were "hot house." The strawberries at Windsor are very fine this year, and they will be just fit to gather when the Queen arrives at the Castle. The persons who gather them always wear clean white cotton gloves when engaged in their task.

IN the marriages of all her descendants the Queen takes the most anxious interest, and she is just now concerning herself very much about her eldest great-grandchild, Princess Theodore. The position of the young Princess, who has just attained her seventeenth year, renders it difficult to find a husband for her who shall be suitable in all ways, for Princess Theodore will be enormously wealthy, whilst she is also the Empress William's niece and our Queen's great-granddaughter. It is rumoured that the Prince who has found favour in her eyes is not in favour at the German Court, and the little matrimonial difficulty is altogether causing some anxiety to Her Majesty and to the Empress Frederick.

THE Princess of Wales has just had some stylish costumes of washing fabrics made for both Princesses Victoria and Maud. The new washing costumes can be made in many kinds of inexpensive materials. The skirts in three sections are made up as five, there being a seam behind but none in front. The front and side gores are shaped with darts at waist, while the back gathers. The bodice has a tight-fitting lining in three parts. There is a new idea in the front, back, and upper sleeve parts, which are arranged with three tucks. Sleeve puffs of medium dimensions are arranged over coat-shaped lining faced with material to meet puff. The upright collar is draped with satin, waist garniture to match. The back and front material sections are first tucked, then gathered on to the tight-fitting lining. The bodice closes without being seen in the centre of front.

STATISTICS.

RED hats were first worn by cardinals in the year 1245.

THREE days per annum is the amount of sickness in human life.

DURING the present century the Bible societies of America and Europe have distributed over 230,000,000 copies.

OVER 300,000 specimens of fossil insects have been collected from various parts of the world. Of these butterflies are among the very rarest, as less than 20 specimens all told have been found.

ACCORDING to careful research there are 51 Anarchist papers published in Europe and America. One is in Dutch, 10 German, 11 French, 8 Italian, 9 Spanish, 2 Spanish and Italian, 2 Portuguese, 2 Tzecish, and 6 English.

GEMS.

No man ever worked honestly without giving some help to his race.

As confidence that we can do a thing often ensures success so doubt and despondency are sure steps to failure.

THEIR will be a harvest from every sowing. Not one grain of the holy seed of love can ever be lost. The life may sink away, and seem to have perished; but from its grave will come an influence which will be a blessing in the world.

THE ideals that we hold, the purposes that we cherish, are but steps in the ladder of life. There are as many above as below them; and it is a far smaller matter to stand upon any particular one than it is to know that we are steadily pursuing the upward path.

ENERGY, fidelity, strength of purpose, a sense of justice and honour, and loyalty to conscience, evidence in themselves painstaking, accurate and generally superior labour; on the other hand, idle, ease-loving, self-indulgent habits, loose notions of right, selfishness, faithlessness and meanness may be traced in much of the unprofitable and inferior work of the world.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

A TOMATO SALAD.—To make this properly the tomatoes should be peeled. To do this easily, dip them in scalding water. They should be put on the ice to get cold. Then sliced thin and put on a large lettuce leaf with a few bits of cress, or the small white leaves from a lettuce, and a flavouring of pepperglass.

ORANGE STRAWBERRIES.—Place a layer of strawberries in a deep dish; cover the same thickly with pulverized sugar, then a layer of berries and so on until all are used. Pour over them orange juice in the proportion of three oranges to a quart of berries. Let stand for an hour, and just before serving sprinkle with powdered ice.

GOOSEBERRY TART.—One and one-half pints gooseberries, one half pound of short crust, three-quarters pound moist sugar. Top and tail the gooseberries with a pair of scissors, wash and put them into a pie dish; cover the edge of the dish with the crust; bake in a good oven for three-quarters of an hour.

WHIPPED CREAM.—Place cream over ice until thoroughly chilled, and whip with an egg-beater or whip-churn until it froths. While whipping place froth on a sieve, and return to bowl to be re-whipped all that passes through. When cream is difficult to whip, add to it and beat with it the white of an egg. Sweetened and flavoured this is a choice dessert alone, but it may be served in various ways. Jelly-glasses one-third full of jelly and filled up with cream make a very wholesome and delicious dessert.

MISCELLANEOUS.

A CHEMIST has invented an instrument for the detection of imitation diamonds by viewing the stone through a reflecting medium. The true diamond can be seen through the instrument while the imitation cannot.

THE importation into the United States of plants from China and Japan is forbidden on account of the prevalence of cholera in the Asiatic countries. Nothing holds the germs of disease so well as the soil in which the plants are shipped.

THREE miles an hour is about the average speed of the Gulf Stream. At certain places, however, it attains a speed of fifty-one miles an hour, the extraordinary rapidity of the current giving the surface, when the sun is shining, the appearance of a sheet of fire.

IF by any means a bird attained the lightness of a balloon it could not fly. A balloon drifts with every gust; steering is impossible, the wind chooses its course. The bird-balloon, as light as the wind and as strong as iron, is a figurement of the imagination.

THE King of Benin, on the West Coast of Africa, believes in the efficacy of human sacrifices. When times are good he kills a large number of slaves, and in seasons of calamity he kills an equally large number of these unfortunates, and in both cases to appease the gods, who are supposed to be equally pleased at the good and ill fortune of mortals.

IT is not generally known that the remains of all the Czars of Russia since Peter the Great lie in a memorial chapel built on one of the islands of the Neva. All the epitaphs are exactly alike, each being a block of white marble without any decoration whatever. The only distinction by which each one is marked is the name of the deceased Emperor.

ONE of the most curious plants in the world is what is called the tooth-brush plant of Jamaica. It is a species of creeper, and has nothing particularly striking about its appearance. By cutting pieces of it to a suitable length, and fraying the ends, the natives convert it into a tooth-brush; and a tooth-powder to accompany the use of the brush is also prepared by pulverizing the dried stems.

THE "sensitive cell" is a new device to enable the police to overhear by telephone the conversation between prisoners in the cells. By it every word said by one prisoner to another can be heard by official listeners in a near-by room. In this way important clues may be found. The general manager of a telephone company said that the new telephone could be used in cells without the knowledge of prisoners.

IN the loftiness of its stations for taking meteorological observations Europe cannot compete with the United States. There are only two stations on the European Continent which reach any very great height, being about 10,000ft. and 11,000ft. respectively. Among the stations in America is Pike's Peak, which has an altitude of 14,100ft.—or only about 1,600ft. lower than the summit of Mont Blanc—and exceeding by just before 3,000ft. any meteorological station in Europe.

A NEW method of fattening oysters is now being tried in Eastern Virginia. In the low, marshy ground that fringes one of the bays on the coast, a number of parallel canals are being made into which the sea-water will be admitted by sluice-gates. In these canals the oysters will be grown, much as water-cresses are grown around London. The oysters will find their natural food, which consists of diatoms and other minute algae, which are reproduced in prodigious quantities when salt-water is mixed with a small percentage of fresh-water. On a small scale the plan has worked successfully. Some of the advantages claimed for the new method of culture are freedom from sewage contamination, the easy exclusion of the enemies of the oyster, and the ease of harvesting.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

APPLICANT.—Appeal to Postmaster General.

A. J. B.—Inquire at Inland Revenue office.

FATIMA.—Publication secures the copyright.

D. C.—Depends upon the amount of your income.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—You had better employ a solicitor.

G. B.—Deborah is of Hebrew descent, signifying a bee.

CARROTS.—Write to the secretary, forwarding your address.

MARIAMNE.—What would remove it would remove the colour of the carpet.

LITTLE HOUSEWIFE.—If you have a proper urn the coffee will fine itself.

PIANIST.—The tone of a piano is best when the instrument is not near a wall.

CONSTANT READER.—The expense of a copy of a will depends upon its length.

W. W.—One line should be sufficient on your part to make the declaration you desire.

APPLICENT.—Press hard upon your upper lip and you can usually overcome this feeling.

CURIOSITY.—It is wholly impossible for anyone to have such essentially private information.

ECONOMIST.—Nothing better, or that you could make up cheaper than what you buy in the shops.

WILD ROSE.—Such a marriage would be null and void, and the issue, if any, would be deemed illegitimate.

LITTLE TOMMY NICKER.—Wire netting carried up from the ground to above the rails is the most efficacious.

JEANETTE.—The pine marion, or American sable, is found in the more northerly parts of North America.

ONE WHO DIVINES.—One who aids sight by means of apparatus erected in front or about the eye is an opticalist.

RAVENLOCK.—The process is a destructive one, but if you are intent upon it most hairdressers can supply material.

FAIRYFOOT.—They may be softened by rubbing plentifully with oil. If the leather is very dirty wash it with good hot soapsuds first.

J. N.—If you write to the Agent-General for the Cape, Victoria-street, London, S.W., he will give the name you desire.

MAKE-UP.—Take some grease and work up enough burnt cork in it to give the desired tint, then apply that to the skin; it washes off easily.

TORY.—Jars made from silver or other metal, with a cover that fits closely, will keep the biscuit fresh longer than those made of china.

OONIE.—The Yellow Sea of China is so-called from the presence of yellow mud washed down by the great rivers that empty into its waters.

A FRIGHT.—Exercise your own judgment and taste in matters of dress. By frequent comparison you will soon find out what is becoming and what is not.

GERALD.—By writing to the secretary of the Civil Service Commission, Cannon-row, Westminster, S.W., date and place of next examination will also be stated.

STATISTICIAN.—The longest artificial water course in the world is the Bengal Canal in India, nine hundred miles; the next is Erie, three hundred and sixty-three.

BUSY BEE.—There is a decided choice of localities in rearing bees. Some places furnish many more flowers than others, and bees seem to do much better there.

G. R. A.—Half pint alcohol, one pint bay rum, quarter ounce tincture of cantharides, half ounce of castor oil, quarter ounce of carbonate of ammonia. Mix and shake up.

MARTHA.—Crush very finely a lot of egg shells. Rub the pan well with soap, and moisten it with water; then scour till clean with the powdered egg shells; then wash and dry.

LOLIPOP.—Boat the whites of four eggs to stiff froth, add two table-spoonfuls each of sugar, raspberry jam, and currant jelly; place in a cool place until ready to serve.

F. A. W.—Diluted oxalic acid is the best thing for taking out such stains as you describe; apply with a sponge, and sponge off with clean water, but do not wet too much.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—A prisoner confined during Her Majesty's pleasure means at the pleasure of the Crown, and would not be released as a necessary consequence upon the death of Her Majesty.

INDIGENT.—It is wise for a young lady to defer to the wishes of her parents or guardians, and it is better to decline an invitation than to accept it if it causes any trouble to them.

S. T.—We cannot advise in the matter before advising to clean thoroughly with boiling water and then oil and whitening. Destroy all the leathers you suppose have done the damage.

NEW BROOM.—Coarse brooms will cut a carpet, and although imperceptible at first, their ravages will at length show themselves in the increased number of shreds, especially if the carpet be a velvet pile.

COUNTRY COUSIN.—The only means by which a total stranger can obtain a situation in London is by advertising for one; but we should not for an instant advise you to give up the place you now hold on such a speculation.

M. Z.—One ounce of oil of vitriol, half gill sweet oil, pulverised rottenstone one gill, water one and a half pints; mix and shake before using; apply this with a rag, and polish with a clean woollen rag or a leather. This gives a beautiful polish.

GREEN.—Fresh water drawn for the purpose and heated to the boiling point is much better for the cooking of vegetables and cereals; it gives the food a better flavour than water which has boiled and steamed a long time.

MARAH.—Absolute dryness and excessive heat together forms the most effective remedy, but impossible to obtain either at home. The next best thing is to rub in turpentine or camphor dissolved in spirits of wine.

EMBODIMENT.—The Banting system of feeding in order to be lean is living chiefly on animal food, abstaining from all saccharine and fatty matter, avoiding stimulants, and in liquids of all kinds only rarely satisfying the requirements of nature.

SILLY SUE.—Strain the stained flannel over a cup or basin, have some benzine collas diluted with water, and sponge the fabric with this, beginning a good bit outside the stain, and working inwards to get out the oil, &c. If the stain is too large for cup or basin lay it over double blotting paper before sponging.

THE MAIDEN'S SOLILOQUY.

Nor married yet, and twenty-nine!

My "friends" are almost in despair;
I see their anxious looks incline
Toward my "fringe" where ought to shine
The silver of the first grey hair!

They talk no more of "single bliss";

But note, with eyes cast gravely down,
The joys unwooded women miss—
The husband's smile, the children's kiss
(Of course a husband cannot frown).

The fullest harmonies of life,

They say in sentences that glow,
Are awakened for the happy wife
(There's no such thing as married strife
In this enlightened age we know).And when they feel extremely kind,
They picture things that "might have been";

And think the men are very blind;

Who rate the "graces of the mind"
Below the charms of sweet seventeen!I say no word of praise or blame—
My life has still its golden days;
And round my well-loved maiden name
Cling many a tender hope and aim
Apart from mankind and their ways.Has light-winged Cupid fluttered by,
And is there only shadow left?Not so; the sun is in the sky,
Why should I fold my hands and sigh,
Like one of brightness quite bereft?But since I am not made of ice,
If Mr. Right should come my way,
And whisper something very nice,
I might, perhaps, consider twice,
And after all not answer "Nay!"

E. M.

THE PIRATE'S SON.—The troopship *Birkenhead* was wrecked on its way from Queenstown to the Cape. It struck on a pointed rock of Simon's Bay, South Africa, on the 26th February, 1852; and of 638 persons only 184 were saved by the boats; 464 of the soldiers and crew perished.

X. Y.—Expose the "roughened" places to the steam coming out of the spout of a boiling tea-kettle. If necessary, when steaming, slightly assist the injured part with a brush, but you must be very careful and tender in treatment, or you will only make matters worse.

A. CONSTANT READER.—Take canned peaches and place them in halves, round side up, on a small flat plate. Around these place whipped cream, sweetened and flavoured with vanilla. They form a very good imitation of poached eggs, and are a delicious surprise to tickle the palate.

LOVERS OF THE "LONDON READER."—Half pound rice, or as much as is wanted. Wash it well in several waters, and put it on in plenty of boiling water with salt to taste. Boil it rapidly for eight minutes, then drain it like potatoes; then run a lot of cold water on it and drain it again; then put on the lid closely and steam for a quarter of an hour.

J. C.—Take one or two drachms of white sugar powdered, twenty-six grains of bicarbonate of soda, six grains of the finest Jamaica ginger powdered, and one drop of essence of lemon. Mix these ingredients, and wrap the powder in a blue paper. Take thirty-six grains of powdered tartaric acid, and thirty grains of powdered citric acid, and wrap in white paper. Use as lemonade powders.

HARRY.—Girls are too prone to be dazzled by a hand-some face and form, and attractive and fascinating manners. These allurements added to a glib tone and plausible statements make many conquests which result in misfortune to those who are deceived by them. Wait until you are older and wiser than your letter indicates ere you commit yourself to a binding betrothal.

A WEARY WOMAN.—If the chairs are morocco they require simply to be washed with a damp sponge, and, as they are drying, brushed with a hard brush; this restores the gloss to real morocco; if the chairs are roan, which is the cheaper kind of leather, if the skin of the leather is unbroken they should be varnished with leather varnish, but it must be done by a skilled person.

JOSEPHINE.—Take one pound of powdered white sugar, half pound of bicarbonate of soda, and one and a half drachms of essence of lemon. Mix these ingredients thoroughly, and divide them between six dozen papers. Take five ounces of tartaric or citric acid, and divide it between the same number of papers. To use, dissolve one of each paper in half a tumblerful of water, then mix the two.

A. W.—Try thin slices of the large Spanish onion, which is much less pungent than the native, yet exceedingly nutritious taken with bread and butter and a little salt; some prefer to boil the onion, throwing away first water, then boiling again in milk, or browning in a pan with a bit of butter; others slice and blanche the vegetable by putting it twice through hot water, then frying.

A LOVER OF CHANSON.—This is a very cheap way of making a most appetising dish quickly and easily. Cut a full slice of bread from a good-sized loaf and toast it a delicate brown, then with a biscuit or cookie cutter cut a circle from the centre. Place the toast on a well-buttered plate. Break an egg in a cup and drop it carefully in the hole made in the toast. Place it over until the egg is set. Garnish with watercress or small lettuce leaves.

YOUNG COOK.—Boil a chicken whole, giving it fifteen minutes to the pound. When done cut it into dice. Take an equal quantity of celery, cut in the same manner, three olives chopped, two table-spoonfuls of capers. Over this pour six spoonfuls of olive oil, two table-spoonfuls of vinegar, two table-spoonfuls of salt and a dash of red pepper. Place it on the fire. If you cannot get celery use lettuce, and if your taste is opposed to olives or oil leave them out.

G. B.—When flies become troublesome they can always be expelled in the following manner. A half-teaspoonful of black pepper, finely ground, should be mixed with double the quantity of brown sugar, the compound to be moistened with cream. The flies will generally eat greedily of this mixture if placed where they can easily reach it, but it will be their last meal, for the least taste of it is to a fly rank poison. They often drop dead within a few feet of the plate which they have just left, and some of the healthiest eaters do not live to leave the plate.

C. M. S.—1. The origin of Thanksgiving Day in the United States is thus related: In 1623 the then Governor of Massachusetts, Bradford, sent out a company for game with which to have a dainty repast, and rejoice one with another over the fruits of their labours. They feasted themselves and Massasoit and ninety of his Indians, and then thanked God for the good things he had provided. So thus was initiated "Thanksgiving Day." 2. The tropic of Cancer (Lat. a. crab) is the northern boundary of the torrid zone, where the sun is vertical at noon at the summer solstice. It is so called because it somewhat resembles a crab in form.

MISS FINCH.—Take about one pound of hake steaks, place in boiling water with a little salt and a table-spoonful of vinegar, and boil till thoroughly cooked. Remove all the skin and bones, and cut the fish into small pieces. Boil half a pound of potatoes, and rub them through a sieve, then mix into the fish. Beat one egg with a table-spoonful of milk, and stir into the mixture with one ounce of butter; pepper and salt to taste. When the mixture is all well beaten together, form it into a fancy mould, place it in a buttered tin, and bake it until it is a golden colour. Serve the pudding on a hot dish, with the following sauce poured round: Blend one ounce of butter with one ounce of flour in a saucepan over the fire, add slowly a gill of boiling stock from the hake, and the same quantity of milk. Stir over the fire for ten minutes, then add two hard-boiled eggs, which have been chopped small, and a few drops of lemon-juice. Pour this sauce round the pudding, and serve.

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